UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Goddesses, Monsters, and Monstrous Goddesses:

The Portrayal of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of Kālī in the *purāṇ*ic narrative known alternatively as the *Devī Māhātmya* or the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, which is embedded in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* and which circulates independently as a popular recitational text in the *śākta* traditions. This portrayal is an important part of Kālī's character within Hindu traditions, and influences her depictions in later textual narratives. This thesis analyses Kālī's character in this early text with recourse to the study of character in narrative theory, incorporating concepts from Indian aesthetic theories and themes from Sanskrit mythic literature more generally in order to give greater context to the figure of Kālī in this narrative.

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for my parents,

who told me stories

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Epigraph

Sometimes, in our confusion, we have been known to turn the Other into a monster *and* a god.

Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness.*

For who can live,
having seen Death enraged?

Devī Māhātmya 4.12

Introduction

The portrayal of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* is both nuanced and complex, and informs later representations of her character in the *purāṇa*s, *tantra*s, and *bhakti* poetry. Her character in this text also informs scholarly understandings of her figure within various Hindu traditions, as many of those characteristics foundational to Kālī's portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya* recur throughout her textual representations. The *Devī Māhātmya* is a *purāṇ*ic narrative dated approximately to the sixth century CE, which is embedded within the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* and which plays an important role within Hindu *śākta*, or goddess-oriented, devotional traditions. Scholarship focusing on Kālī often cites her portrayal in this text as early evidence of those traits that become pivotal features of Kālī's literary and visual representations in traditions developing after the composition of this text. Kālī's role and position in *tantr*ic literature, beginning in approximately the sixth to ninth centuries CE, is particularly significant in this context, as it is within the *tantra* traditions that she begins to be identified as the ultimate divine reality. This identification continues into the more recently developed Kālī-oriented *bhakti*, or devotional, movements, the literary evidence of which begins in the mid-eighteenth century with the rise of Bengali devotional poetry dedicated to Kālī. Several of Kālī's characteristics as described in the *Devī Māhātmya* reappear throughout her later mythology and iconography: her proclivity for blood-drinking, her long tongue, her gruesome appearance and behaviour, and her association with wrathfulness are significant in her larger literary context.

This thesis provides a detailed character study of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*, analysing her portrayal both individually and in comparison with the other major characters in the narrative. A close reading of Kālī's representation in this text provides a considerable

amount of information about her character, which is important for understanding her figure within the larger Hindu traditions. The *Devī Māhātmya* is a significant text for an analysis of Kālī's character; this is due in part to the text's early composition and high status within Hindu *śākta* traditions, as well as its pivotal place within Kālī-oriented studies. The vast majority of Kālī scholarship cites the *Devī Māhātmya* in order to provide a brief portrait of her figure in this early text. A study of Kālī in this text thus contributes to that scholarship by enriching scholarly understandings of this early conception of Kālī, and by providing further evidence significant for the study of her figure's development over time. It becomes clear through a close reading of the *Devī Māhātmya* that Kālī is an central character in the text's overall narrative, despite her brief storyline, and that the text is important for Kālī's own representations within Hindu literature. The text constructs Kālī as a significant character not only through emphasising her gruesomeness, her violence, and her wrathfulness, all of which are important themes within the larger context of Sanskrit literature, but also by positing her as indispensable to the battle, as well as by the amount and quality of textual space in which she is prominent.

The analysis of Kālī's portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya* is expanded and enriched by considering her place within the larger character framework of the text. In the *Devī Māhātmya*, characters are defined primarily by their allegiances in battle, as well as through a variety of descriptive features. The narrative combines multiple visual and iconographic descriptors to posit its characters in particular ways and to differentiate among them. Part of this positioning is accomplished through explicit labelling and description, but a substantial amount of information is conveyed implicitly through subtle textual cues, including shared traits and similarities in behaviour. Understanding Kālī's position within these larger character frameworks is crucial for comprehending her portrayal in the text, as particular

features of Kālī become clear only in comparison to the other characters. Examining Kālī in this context highlights those features of Kālī that are surprisingly similar to the *asura*, or antigod, characters, and suggests that Kālī, explicitly labelled as a *devī* or goddess, represents the character type of an *asur*ic *devī*.[1] Her similarities to the *asura* characters are strong enough to position her as substantially more similar to the *asura*s than are any of the other *devī*s present in the text.

The evidence for the claim that Kālī is an *asur*ic *devī* also provides information about the ways in which the *Devī Māhātmya* conceives of *deva*s, *devī*s, and *asura*s more generally. These conceptions suggest that the text's larger theological objective of constructing the *mahādevī*, or great goddess, as the supreme divine reality requires the inclusion of a character who expresses the necessary claim that the *mahādevī* has an *asur*ic aspect. Analysing Kālī vis-à-vis the other characters in the *Devī Māhātmya* suggests that Kālī functions within this text in two particularly important ways, which mutually reflect and reinforce each other and which support this larger theological objective. First, through the use of repeated textual cues indicating Kālī's similarities both to the *asura*s and to Caṇḍikā, the *mahādevī*, the text implies that Kālī represents the *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*. The text explicitly refers to this aspect, labelling it as the *mahāsurī* or great antigoddess; this aspect exists as part of the larger theological conception of the text, which considers the *mahādevī* to encompass all aspects of reality within her. Kālī's position as an *asur*ic *devī* suggests that she best represents this *asur*ic aspect, which may also have implications for understanding her later representations within Hindu traditions. Second, Kālī's position as an *asur*ic *devī* places her in a liminal state, as her character is posited on

[1] The term '*asura*' is frequently translated as either 'demon' or 'antigod;' both terms indicate that these figures oppose the *deva*s, or gods.

the boundary between the *devī*s and the *asura*s. Her position here reflects a further intention on the part of the text, which is to posit the *devī*s as a whole to be liminal characters, placed between the *deva*s and *asura*s. The text constructs the *devī*s in such a way that they share certain characteristics with each group, although primarily with the *asura*s. The *devī*s are thus not merely feminine versions of the *deva*s, and are instead a separate class of beings existing in a liminal position analogous to that of Kālī. Kālī's *asur*ic identity acts to highlight those *asur*ic qualities common to the *devī*s more generally.

This analysis of Kālī begins by closely examining the means by which the *Devī Māhātmya* explicitly and implicitly seeks to construct her character. To this end, the project draws upon the approach of character study in literary theory more generally, with particular reference to the works of Mieke Bal and Kevin McGrath.[2] McGrath's detailed analysis of Karṇa within the *Mahābhārata*, in particular, provides many of the specific methods of analysis this project uses to analyse Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*. This analysis thus includes a close examination of the text's explicit descriptors of Kālī's character, as well as the implicit and subtle textual markers contributing to her representation. This project also explores the relationships between Kālī and the other characters within the text, particularly with reference to those characters demonstrating marked similarities to her figure. Many of Kālī's features are also considered within the larger Sanskrit literary context, which enriches this project's analysis. A consideration of Indian literary theories, with particular attention to the theory of *rasa*, lends greater support to the conclusions of this project. This thesis' close reading of Kālī rests upon a larger assumption about the nature of texts, which is expressed clearly in the work of Umberto Eco, who claims that

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[2] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009). Kevin McGrath, *The Sanskrit Hero: Karṇa in Epic Mahābhārata*, Brill's Indological Library, 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

narrative texts intentionally use the reader to fill in the necessary gaps left by the narrative, without which the text would not be understandable.[3] These choices result in a negotiation between the text and the reader, through which the understanding of the narrative emerges. While Eco does not explicitly discuss *purāṇ*ic texts, the nature of the *purāṇa*s, particularly their lack of identifiable author, allows for this assumption to inform their study. Furthermore, as characters, particularly those who are divine or semi-divine, are an exceptionally important part of Hindu narratives, looking carefully at the choices a text requires the reader to make about these characters affords a valuable approach to the text itself, and also provides a great deal more information about the characters than is provided by a quick and superficial reading.

While the aim of this project is to expand and enrich scholarly understandings of the figure of Kālī by closely analysing her portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya*, this study also provides an analysis of the larger character framework in which Kālī occupies her strange and unique position. The *devī*s and *asura*s, in particular, are described thoroughly in this thesis, and their relationships with one another as well as with the *deva*s are analysed. This provides a more complete picture of the text's conception of *deva*s, *asura*s, and particularly *devī*s, which is especially important for a greater understanding of the text's theological underpinnings and intentions. As Thomas B. Coburn has argued, the *Devī Māhātmya* represents a 'crystallisation' of multiple local and regional *devī*s into the larger theological concept of the *mahādevī* by a process that involves the incorporation of non-Sanskritic or

[3] Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

tribal themes into the brahmanical tradition.[4] Kālī's position as a liminal character and as a representation of the *mahāsurī* may lend support to these claims. Her portrayal as such may indicate a clear textual intention to incorporate the particularly fierce tribal *devī*s, of which Kālī may be paradigmatic, into the *mahādevī* in particular ways.

This project also provides evidence for the ways by which the text seeks to convey its construction of character. The text rests upon multiple linguistic, visual, and behavioural cues, along with the careful organisation of textual space, to convey certain conceptions of characters both as individuals and as larger groups. These cues combine to create textual images of individual characters; traits shared between characters serve to construct each individual character in particular ways. This is especially evident in the case of Kālī, whose character is made clearer by examining the characteristics shared between her and the other characters, especially Caṇḍikā and the *asura*s. These larger character analyses, combined with the study of Kālī's character as an individual figure, serve to create a detailed image of Kālī as a character in this early text, which may augment understandings of her depictions in later traditions.

Outline

The first chapter of this thesis provides background to the *Devī Māhātmya*, locating the text within its historical and cultural context and summarising its storyline. This chapter also provides an overview of western scholarship focusing specifically on the *Devī Māhātmya*, as well as some comments on the history of western *purāṇ*ic scholarship, noting where that scholarship impacts and informs studies of the *Devī Māhātmya*. An overview of

[4] Thomas B. Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988[1984]); see also Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation* (Albany: SUNY, 1991).

Kālī studies is included, with particular reference to those studies which refer to the *Devī Māhātmya*. Few studies have examined Kālī within this text, indicating a lacuna to which this character study can contribute. Chapter One also includes a description of the methodology used in the analyses of Chapters Two and Three, arguing for the applicability of this approach to the subject and detailing the methods used in this analysis.

Chapter Two begins the investigation into the nature of Kālī's character, focusing almost exclusively on Kālī as an individual, rather than in the context of the other characters within the text. This chapter demonstrates Kālī's significance to the overall narrative of the *Devī Māhātmya*, beginning with a summary of Kālī's storyline within the text and moving thereafter to more detailed analyses. Kālī's primary characteristics are demonstrated to be gruesomeness, violence, and anger, as determined through a close study of her textual representation. Her repulsive appearance and connections to wrath are discussed with reference to the aesthetic theory of *rasa* in the Indian literary tradition, while her capacity for extreme violence is closely analysed, along with her production of loud noises and her speech-act. Kālī's violence is best understood within the larger Sanskrit literary context, as violence is an important theme in many texts, including, in particular, the *Sauptikaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. Kālī's fundamental characteristics are also discussed with reference to her larger literary traditions, and her figure is briefly analysed with recourse to western narrative theory.

Chapter Three analyses Kālī within the context of the other characters in the *Devī Māhātmya*. The *deva*s, *devī*s, and *asura*s are described, and their character types are constructed. Kālī's portrayal is then analysed with reference to these character types; in so doing, this project constructs Kālī's character type. In particular, Kālī's characteristics are examined in comparison to the *mātṛ*s, a smaller group of violent mother-goddesses, to

Śivadūtī, to the *asura*s, and to Caṇḍikā. Kālī's similarities to the *asura*s, her status as a *devī*, and her close relationship with Caṇḍikā indicate her position as the representation of the *asur*ic *devī* character type. As this type, Kālī expresses the *mahāsur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*. The *mahāsurī* is discussed with reference to the cultural world in which the *Devī Māhātmya* exists, since the connections between the *asura*s and the *mahādevī*, particularly with respect to the concept of *māyā* or illusion, are integral to the *asur*ic aspect present in the *Devī Māhātmya*'s conception of the *mahādevī*. Kālī's liminal position as this *mahāsur*ic aspect is also discussed in this chapter, as is that of the *devī*s more generally.

The Conclusion returns to the use of literary theories in the study of Sanskrit narrative texts and to the construction of Kālī as an *asur*ic *devī*. The application of western literary theory, particularly in context with both Indian aesthetic theories and tropes common within Sanskrit literature, allows for a closer and more thorough examination of the *Devī Māhātmya*'s presentation of character. Such an analysis provides information about the position of the *Devī Māhātmya* within the larger textual worlds of Sanskrit literature, and also provides evidence for this project's assertion that Kālī represents an *asur*ic *devī*. This conception of Kālī may provide further insights both for the position of the *Devī Māhātmya* within the larger processes of religious change and literary developments and for Kālī's development within Hindu textual and devotional traditions. Kālī's position as *asur*ic is discussed with reference to her other literary representations, and her status as the *mahāsurī* in the *Devī Māhātmya* is considered to be significant for her later position as the *mahādevī* in both *tantra* and Kālī-oriented *bhakti* traditions.

Chapter One: History of Scholarship & Methodology

This chapter introduces the *Devī Māhātmya*, placing it in its historical and cultural context and providing a brief summary of its principal storyline. The focus of this project is on the role of Kālī as a character within the text, and uses narrative theory as methodology rather than an approach based in history. A brief grounding of the *Devī Māhātmya* within its historical context, however, provides information concerning Kālī's character, particularly with regard to the other ferocious *devī*s present in the cultural imagination during the time of the text's first composition. Such a grounding provides important points about the text itself. Chapter One also discusses the general approaches of western scholarship to both Kālī and the *Devī Māhātmya*, as an overview of these approaches indicates the lacuna to which this thesis contributes. Scholarship on the *Devī Māhātmya* is best understood within the context of *purāṇ*ic scholarship more generally, as several of the trends within *purāṇ*ic scholarship have contributed in significant ways to studies of the *Devī Māhātmya*. This chapter's summary of scholarship on Kālī pays specific attention to those contemporary studies focusing on her role in literature, particularly to those incorporating her position in the *Devī Māhātmya* into their analyses. While the majority of this scholarship does not play a significant role in the analysis of this thesis, it is included here both to give context to the scholarly tradition in which this project is situated and to demonstrate and account for the minimal focus historically paid to narrative, both in the *Devī Māhātmya* specifically and, more generally, for Kālī within Hindu traditions. Chapter One concludes with a description of the methodology utilised for the analyses in Chapters Two and Three, focusing particularly on the models of Mieke Bal and of Kevin McGrath,

and discussing the ways by which these analyses contribute to understandings of the figure and role of Kālī within the text.

Historical & Cultural Context of the *Devī Māhātmya*

The historical and cultural context of the *Devī Māhātmya*, while important for situating the text within its cultural world, also provides information about the position of Kālī within the text's conception of the *mahādevī*, a position which significantly informs Kālī's character in the text. Her role and function in the narrative rest at least partially, if not primarily, on her position as a particular type of *devī*. This type of *devī*, here called an *asur*ic *devī*, serves to express the *mahāsurī* aspect of Caṇḍikā, the *mahādevī*. It is thus helpful to attempt to understand the position this text plays in the development of the cosmological idea of the *mahādevī*, as well as to understand the role of the lesser *devī*s within that concept. Prior to the theological conception expressed in the *Devī Māhātmya*, namely the personification of a feminine ultimate divinity, *devī*s were conceived of only as individuals. These individual figures frequently expressed a single concept, theological function, or natural phenomenon. For example, Vedic *devī*s such as Vāc or Nirṛti expressed the concepts of speech and night, respectively. As the idea of the *mahādevī* developed, individual *devī*s were increasingly understood to be specific aspects or manifestations of that one great *devī*. Their particular qualities began to indicate their individual identities as multiple aspects of the singular *mahādevī*, rather than as separate deities altogether. This shift in thought is expressed clearly in the *Devī Māhātmya* through the use of multiple *devī* characters understood to be manifestations of Caṇḍikā, the *mahādevī*. The character of Kālī, who more so than the other *devī*s expresses a specific and recognisable aspect of the

mahādevī, is representative of the text's attempt to fuse multiple local and minor *devī*s into the larger, pan-regional supreme divinity.

Texts live within cultural worlds, and in order to comprehend Kālī's role as a *devī* within this text, both individually and among the other characters, it is necessary to understand how the culture in which this text lives conceives of the *mahādevī* and her place in the larger cosmology. As the ultimate divinity, the *mahādevī* contains within herself the entirety of the cosmos, and she is responsible for its creation, sustenance, and dissolution; as such she is a devotional figure, and is meant to be worshipped. The concept of the *mahādevī* as such during the time of the composition of the *Devī Māhātmya* is important for Kālī's figure in this text, as Kālī's relationship to the *mahādevī* is foundational to the construction of her character. However, scholarly knowledge concerning this historical and cultural context is limited. This section thus briefly includes a discussion of the position of the text within later devotional traditions, which provides further details of the cultural world the *Devī Māhātmya* inhabits. Such context exemplifies the importance of the concept of the *mahādevī* within devotional contexts, and reiterates the important point that *devī*s are often worshipped as the *mahādevī* herself. As each *devī* is both an aspect of the *mahādevī* and an expression of the *mahādevī* as a unified being, devotion to one *devī* is often understood to be devotion to the *mahādevī* through the specific vehicle of the individual, lesser *devī*. Alternatively, a *devī* may be viewed within her specific devotional traditions as the most complete and perfected form of the great feminine reality. This larger cultural context may provide some evidence towards the development of Kālī's position in those later traditions devoted exclusively to her, as those traditions generally view Kālī as the *mahādevī* herself, rather than as a mere aspect.

The *Devī Māhātmya* comprises chapters 81 through 93 of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which H.H. Wilson dated to the ninth or tenth century.[1] Later scholars rejected this date, and most contemporary scholars now accept Frederick Eden Pargiter's placement of the text between 300-600 CE. Hillary Rodrigues notes that most scholars date the text to the fifth or sixth centuries CE,[2] although some, such as Charlotte Schmid, consider the text's composition to be during the seventh century CE.[3] According to Pargiter, this *purāṇa* was most likely composed somewhere in western India, north of the Narmada river valley.[4] The *Devī Māhātmya* itself is almost certainly an independently composed later addition, although most scholars usually consider its date as coinciding with that of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.[5] Thomas Coburn, the most significant modern scholar of the *Devī Māhātmya*, consistently dates it to the fifth or sixth centuries CE, following the dates of Pargiter and V.V. Mirashi.[6] The earliest manuscript has been dated to 998 CE,[7] with an inscription citing a verse from the text dated to either 608 CE or circa 613 CE.[8] These dates indicate that Kālī's representation in this text precedes her representations in both *tantr*ic and *bhakti* literature, which suggests that some of her features, as described in this text, may have influenced conceptions of her in these later textual traditions. It is possible that Kālī's relationship to Caṇḍikā in this text also inspires her later representations, and that this early

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[1] H.H. Wilson, *The Vishṇu Purāṇa: A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1961[1840]), xxxv.
[2] Hillary P. Rodrigues, "Durgā," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 537.
[3] Charlotte Schmid, "À propos des premières images de la Tueuse de buffle : déesses et krishnaïsme ancien," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 90-91 (2003): 9.
[4] Frederick Eden Pargiter, *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1904), viii-xiii.
[5] Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, History of Indian Literature II, 3 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986), 195.
[6] Pargiter, *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, viii-xiii; and V.V. Mirashi, "A Lower Limit for the Date of the Devī-Māhātmya," *Purāṇa* 6, no. 1 (1964): 181-86.
[7] Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, History of Indian Literature II, 1 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), 282.
[8] See Mirashi, "A Lower Limit," for an argument for the later date; the earlier is that of D.R. Bhandakar which was subsequently accepted by Moriz Winternitz and Vasudeva Agrawala, discussed in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 195.

connection of Kālī with the *mahādevī* provides the impetus for later identifications of Kālī as the *mahādevī*. These issues will be more fully addressed in the subsequent chapters.

Scholars know very little about the circumstances of the *Devī Māhātmya*'s composition, aside from these tentative dates and Pargiter's attempt to situate the text geographically. Coburn places the text within the larger contexts of integration and interaction between the Āryan and non-Āryan peoples, particularly with regard to portrayals of femininity and feminine religious power in each. He claims that the *Devī Māhātmya* represents the first extant textual representation of the ultimate reality as feminine, and views this representation as the result of the interactions between the Āryans, whose cosmologies indicated a relative lack of feminine imagery, and the non-Āryans who, argues Coburn, had religious material rich in feminine representations.[9] He has also applied the theory of 'brahmanical synthesis' to the *Devī Māhātmya*, arguing that the composition of the text in Sanskrit points to the text's position within the larger cultural movements of religious creativity in the late centuries BCE that intentionally attempted to remain connected to Vedic and Sanskritic traditions. These movements often incorporated Vedic concepts of sacrifice into new forms of cultural and textual representation. 'Brahmanical synthesis' is a term coined by Thomas J. Hopkins to refer to a period of religious creativity in the last centuries BCE that self-consciously remained associated to these earlier traditions.[10] This theory of synthesis, particularly in its later forms during the period of *purāṇ*ic composition, is a common assumption within Hindu studies. The works of Velcheru Narayana Rao, who examines the ideological change that occurs when a 'folk

[9] Thomas B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation,* (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 13-16. This argument rests partially on the female forms of some of the figurines found in the Indus River Valley; current debates on the meaning of these forms renders definite claims impossible.

[10] Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, The Religious Life of Man (Encino and Belmont, CA: Dickenson Publishing Co., 1971), 64-107.

story' is put into *purāṇ*ic form, and Kunal Chakrabarti, who discusses the construction of the Bengali regional *purāṇ*ic tradition, provide two excellent examples of this theory as it is used in modern scholarship.[11]

Few scholars, aside from Coburn, have thoroughly discussed the position of the *Devī Māhātmya* within the historical context of cultural and religious development. Coburn notes that in the early centuries CE feminine imagery again began to appear in literary and iconographic forms, and he understands the *Devī Māhātmya* to be a textual synthesis of multiple concepts from these larger processes of religious change. This synthesis incorporated new material into the larger brahmanical and Sanskritic tradition by multiple means, including the use of Sanskrit and the idea of divine feminine figures.[12] Both Coburn and C. Mackenzie Brown note that the *Devī Māhātmya* is an exceptionally important text for *śākta*, or goddess-oriented, devotional traditions, primarily because of the text's conception of the *mahādevī* as the ultimate reality.[13] Coburn repeatedly claims throughout his work that the text represents a fusion of multiple local or regional *devī*s into the larger *mahādevī* who thereby contains multiple aspects and figures, an important theme in later *devī*-oriented devotional movements. The text's self-conscious and intentional integration of these *devī*s into the pan-regional *mahādevī* is an important part of the text's cosmology, which rests upon the foundational conception of the *mahādevī* as the ultimate divinity. Indeed, as Coburn frequently claims, the *Devī Māhātmya* very likely represents the earliest extant textual representation of the ultimate divine reality as feminine. These points

[11] Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa as Brahminic Ideology," in *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: SUNY, 1993); Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[12] Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 17-18.
[13] C. Mackenzie Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess: The Canonical Models and Theological Visions of the Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Albany: SUNY, 1990).

influence the understanding of Kālī's position within this text, as this historical context supports the hypothesis that Kālī represents a particular type of *devī* integrated by the text into the *mahādevī* as a specific aspect of that ultimate reality, and that her role as such is an important part of the narrative.

Culturally, the *Devī Māhātmya* is an extraordinarily important text within devotional traditions, both historically and in contemporary India. It has been regularly copied by devotees, it is recited daily in temples dedicated to Durgā, and it forms a significant part of the festival of Durgā Pūjā or Navarātrī.[14] As Coburn notes, the *Devī Māhātmya* has "a tremendously vital independent life," with innumerable variant manuscripts and a minimum of sixty-seven commentaries, this last a rarity among texts in the *purāṇ*ic corpus.[15] Coburn has endeavoured to convey something of this rich public life in his book *Encountering the Goddess*, which, along with a translation of the text, provides a discussion of the *aṅga*s or interpretive tools that are associated with the *Devī Māhātmya*, an examination of various concerns arising from a selection of commentaries on the text, and some examples of the ways by which the text functions within contemporary Hindu traditions. This last section focuses on individuals who engage with the text regularly in their religious lives. Focusing on the *Devī Māhātmya* as a performative and ritual text within the lives and experiences of modern Hindus is an approach used with increasing frequency within *Devī Māhātmya*-oriented scholarship: Cynthia Ann Humes, for example,

[14] Thomas B. Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, eds. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996), 31; see also Hillary P. Rodrigues, *Ritual Worship of the Great Goddess: The Liturgy of the Durgā Pūjā with Interpretations* (Albany: SUNY, 2003).

[15] Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 8.

discusses the experiences of Hindu women in this context.[16] This scholarly focus on commentaries, *aṅga*s, and contemporary practices is partially motivated by the lack of any conclusive information concerning the historical origins of this text, as well as by the text's evident importance as an oral and thus performative artefact.[17]

Despite this shortage of conclusive information concerning the text's historical origins, a few further comments can be made about the *Devī Māhātmya* as a text within Sanskrit, and in particular *purāṇ*ic, literature. As a genre of text, *māhātmya*s display several characteristic traits, which primarily involve the promotion of a deity and the attempt to expand and extend that deity's devotional tradition. Jan Gonda notes that the *Devī Māhātmya* is a well-known example of this kind of literature.[18] The term *māhātmya* translates as 'greatness' or 'glorification,' and Greg Bailey expands Gonda's definition to include a text that exalts "the greatness of a particular place, ritual or implement charged with religious power."[19] Bailey claims that a *māhātmya* is similar in many ways to a *purāṇa*; for example, both kinds of texts mix dialogue with mythic elements and both frequently display a strong connection to *bhakti* traditions. He notes that *māhātmya*s differ from *purāṇa*s in obvious ways as well; such differences include the smaller size of *māhātmya*s and the tight focus they attempt to show to a particular subject, while *purāṇa*s tend to encompass a wide variety of material.[20] The *Devī Māhātmya* expresses many of these common traits, including, most importantly, the glorification of a particular deity. The text constructs the *mahādevī* as the supreme deity in the cosmos, and details her exploits

[16] Cynthia Ann Humes, "Glorifying the Great Goddess or Great Women? Hindu Women's Experience in Ritual Recitation of *Devi-Mahatmya*," in *Women and Goddess Traditions: In Antiquity and Today*, ed. Karen L. King (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).
[17] Coburn emphasises this by labelling the *Devī Māhātmya* as "one of the major verbal artifacts that has been left in the Indian subcontinent." *Encountering the Goddess*, 1.
[18] Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature*, 281.
[19] Greg Bailey, *Gaṇeśapurāṇa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1995), 23.
[20] Ibid., 23-24.

and prowess in order to promote her worship; this depiction influences the conception of the *mahādevī* in both *tantra* and *bhakti* contexts. Furthermore, the text includes both dialogue in the larger frame narrative and mythic sections in the smaller subnarratives. This is similar, as Bailey claims, to a *purāṇa*. Ludo Rocher argues that these similarities indicate that *māhātmya*s are not essentially different from *purāṇa*s.[21] The consideration of the *Devī Māhātmya* within this *purāṇ*ic literary context provides a more detailed perspective about the nature of the text's narrative elements, and the relationship of the *Devī Māhātmya* to the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, in which it is embedded, allows for the consideration of the *purāṇ*ic context. The *Devī Māhātmya* is, however, most frequently studied separately from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* due to the smaller text's position as an independent and important text within *devī*-oriented devotional traditions. This issue is discussed in greater depth in the following Methodology section.

As a final note, the placement of the *Devī Māhātmya* in its historical and cultural context indicates certain assumptions on the part of the text about the nature of its primary characters. As Umberto Eco argues, "[i]n order to read a work of fiction, one must have some notion of the economic criteria that rule the fictional world."[22] To this end, a brief consideration of certain character themes present within the text's understanding of mythic figures will enrich this study. The three major character groups in the *Devī Māhātmya* are the *deva*s, the *devī*s, and the *asura*s. The *deva*s, relatively weak figures constantly harassed by the *asura*s, require rescue and assistance either from the *mahādevī* alone or from a group of *devī*s led by the *mahādevī*. Conflicts between *deva*s and *asura*s populate Hindu mythology and are perhaps one of the most common literary tropes within Hindu narrative

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[21] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 71.
[22] Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 112.

literature. These conflicts can be traced back to at least the later Vedic periods, in which the term *asura* begins to take on the connotation of an enemy of the *deva*s, a connotation it holds at the time of the composition of the *Devī Māhātmya*.[23] The *deva*s and the *asura*s are thus posited as opposites, an eternally incompatible dichotomy whose exploits and confrontations serve as the basis for the majority of Hindu myths. The *asura*s frequently challenge the authority of the *deva*s, whose positions of power ensure the continued harmony of the cosmos. When that authority is stripped from them by the *asura*s, who in post-epic literature are often posited as more physically powerful in battle than are the majority of the *deva*s, the universe is destabilised and chaos ensues. Often the *deva*s win back their authority through a trick or a clever twist of words; this trope is particularly common in the myths in which Śiva or Viṣṇu restores the harmony of the universe by relegating the *asura*s to their proper positions in the netherworlds.

The *Devī Māhātmya* follows this general pattern of destabilisation and then a renewal of order, albeit with a slightly different set of characters. In this text, the force that triumphs over the *asura*s is the feminine *mahādevī*, who is identified as both the primary ontological divine reality and the ultimate salvific presence in the universe. The concept of the *mahādevī* requires that all other *devī*s present in the cultural imagination be conceived of as lesser manifestations of the one great *devī*. Traces of *devī*s as feminine divine beings similar to the masculine *deva*s can be found in the earliest Vedas, as previously mentioned, and the *devī*s developed in both number and detail from that time forwards. The *Devī Māhātmya* explicitly merges several of these individual *devī*s into the *mahādevī*, and implies that all *devī*s, whether or not they are present in the text, are merely aspects of the

[23] Wash Edward Hale, *Ásura- in Early Vedic Religion* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986). See in particular pages 86, 114, 130, 134, and 170-178.

mahādevī. There are different types of *devī*s present in the text, and while their relationships to one another are discussed more fully in Chapter Three, a brief description is useful here. The text describes several of the *devī*s who appear as characters within it as *śakti*s or *mātṛ*s; the meanings of these terms are not made explicitly clear in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as they refer to conceptions of *devī*s existing in the cultural world outside of the text. The term *śakti* generally refers to the force or power that gives life and strength to a *dev*ic figure, and is usually characterised as feminine. In the *Devī Māhātmya* the term *śakti* is used to refer to those *devī*s who emerge from a *deva* or from another *devī* as a personified expression of feminine power. The *mātṛ*s or *mātṛkā*s, often translated as the ‘mothers,’ are presented in the *Devī Māhātmya* as a group of seven *devī*s who are also the *śakti*s of specific *deva*s. In other textual material, these figures are understood to be a particularly fierce group of *devī*s who are familiar mythic characters in the periods after the composition of this text, especially in various *tantra* traditions. Traces of groups of *mātṛ*s, seven in number, can also be found in the Vedic period, although it is unclear exactly which themes influenced their conception in this text.[24] These groups of *devī*s are important for a discussion of Kālī’s character, as Kālī’s similarities to and differences from these groups provide details for the construction of her character type.

It is important to note here that through its conception of the *mahādevī*, the *Devī Māhātmya* alters the typical pattern of Hindu myths by positing the *mahādevī* as the figure necessary for the defeat of the *asura*s. In the more typical pattern, the *deva*s fight on behalf of their own group, as do the *asura*s. Given this widespread arrangement, it could be assumed that a *devī* would fight on behalf of *devī*s. Instead, the *mahādevī* fights on behalf

[24] Thomas B. Coburn, “Appendix A: The Seven Little Mothers,” *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 313-330. While Kālī is later identified as the leader of the *mātṛ*s, in this text she is distinct from them.

of the *deva*s, a group of which she is not a member. In *devī*-oriented *bhakti* traditions, this is interpreted to indicate her superiority to the *deva*s, who are unable to fight the *asura*s successfully. It also exemplifies her willingness to give aid to her devotees, an important part of the text's attempt to posit her as the salvific presence in the cosmos. As a final note about the *mahādevī*, while many epithets for her character are used in the *Devī Māhātmya*, this thesis uses the epithet 'Caṇḍikā' for two reasons. First, it is the most frequent term for the *mahādevī*, aside from *devī*, in this text. The second most frequent term is Ambikā, which can mean 'mother,' 'mother dear,' or even 'a good woman;' the juxtaposition of these two epithets points towards the text's conception of the *mahādevī* as a figure that encompasses all aspects of reality. Second, the word Caṇḍikā means 'the violent and impetuous one,' a theme which echoes the violent and disruptive Kālī, who is the focus of this thesis.[25]

Summary of the *Devī Māhātmya*

The *Devī Māhātmya* is structured as a frame narrative, within which three subplots are embedded. In the first half of the frame story, the king Suratha and the merchant Samādhi have independently retired to the forest out of sorrow at the wicked deeds of others. Suratha's ministers have effected a coup, leaving Suratha powerless, while Samādhi's family has taken his wealth and abandoned him. The two men meet and share their stories, deciding to go together to speak to the sage Medhas, who relates to them three stories about Caṇḍikā, the *mahādevī*. In the second half of the frame story, occurring after Medhas' storytelling, Suratha and Samādhi decide to worship Caṇḍikā, electing to live on

[25] Thomas B. Coburn, "Consort of None, Śakti of All: The Vision of the *Devi-Mahatmya*," in *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, eds. John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), 163; and Thomas Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," 40. See also Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*, 94-99.

the bank of a river and offering flowers, incense, fire, water, and their own blood as sacrifices to her.[26] After three years Caṇḍikā appears to them and offers them boons; Suratha asks for the return of his kingdom and Samādhi asks for the knowledge that destroys attachment. Caṇḍikā grants these wishes and disappears. Suratha is later reborn as the Manu Sāvarṇi, which ties the narrative of the *Devī Māhātmya* to the larger *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, in which the *Devī Māhātmya* is embedded and which recounts stories of the various Manus, or the rulers of particular eras.

The three stories told by Medhas to the two men comprise the bulk of the text. In each story, Caṇḍikā appears after being praised by one or more *deva*s and restores order to a world made chaotic by the presence of *asura*s. In the first story, Brahmā and the sleeping Viṣṇu, who rest upon the serpent Śeṣa in the vast primordial ocean, are threatened by the *asura*s Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who have emerged from Viṣṇu's ear. Brahmā, dwelling in a lotus in Viṣṇu's navel, begins to praise Caṇḍikā, extolling her pre-eminence as the creator and protector of the world and calling upon her to release Viṣṇu from his sleep. Caṇḍikā, who was dwelling within Viṣṇu in the form of *yoganidrā*, or yogic sleep, comes forth from Viṣṇu in response to Brahmā's praise, allowing Viṣṇu to awaken. Once Viṣṇu is released by Caṇḍikā from this sleep, he sees Madhu and Kaiṭabha threatening Brahmā and begins to battle them. The fight lasts for five thousand years. Eventually, deluded by their own arrogance, Madhu and Kaiṭabha offer Viṣṇu a boon, and he asks that they allow themselves to be killed by him. Thinking to trick him, the *asura*s grant him the boon of slaying them on any place that is not covered by water. Viṣṇu immediately lifts them onto his thighs and

[26] This blood sacrifice foreshadows later ritual sacrifices often performed in *tantra* and *devī*-oriented *bhakti* traditions, particularly those devoted to Kālī, and may reflect those sacrifices either performed by or associated with non-Āryan groups during the time period in which the *Devī Māhātmya* was composed. It is not, however, a prominent theme in this text; for example, when the *deva*s worship Caṇḍikā they do not offer their own blood.

decapitates them with his discus. The story ends there, with Medhas telling his listeners that he will recount another narrative.

This next story concerns the *asura* Mahiṣa, the buffalo-*asura*. After a long battle, Mahiṣāsura and his armies have bested the *deva*s and taken their offices and authority. The *deva*s go to Viṣṇu and Śiva, asking for their help, as they are unable to defeat the *asura*s on their own. Viṣṇu and Śiva become angry at Mahiṣāsura's usurpation, and from Viṣṇu's enraged face comes forth *tejas*, or fiery power and splendour. This *tejas* also comes forth from the faces of Śiva and Brahmā and from the bodies of all the *deva*s. Caṇḍikā is mediated into flesh through this *tejas*, with each *deva* giving Caṇḍikā a part of her body, as well as various weapons and assorted ornaments. The *deva*s praise her and ask her to kill Mahiṣāsura for them. While Caṇḍikā is not born from the *deva*s, but rather channelled through them into this particular form, it is clear that her manifestation in this episode occurs for the sake of the *deva*s. Caṇḍikā fights Mahiṣāsura, defeating him and his armies after a lengthy battle, and restores the *deva*s to their rightful offices. The *deva*s extol her virtues and she promises to return and help the *deva*s whenever they remember her in a time of need. She then disappears.

The third story is the most important for the purposes of this study, as it is in this subnarrative that the character Kālī appears. In this episode, the *deva*s have once again lost their authority to the *asura*s, this time led by the brothers Śumbha and Niśumbha. The *deva*s praise Caṇḍikā in the hopes that she will deliver them from the threat of the *asura*s. The *devī* Pārvatī, overhearing the *deva*s, asks them whom they are praising. Caṇḍikā comes forth from the bodily sheath of Pārvatī, answering that it is she who is praised by the *deva*s. Two servants of Śumbha and Niśumbha, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, see the beautiful Caṇḍikā and report it to the *asura* kings. The brothers decide that one of them should marry her, failing

to recognise her position as the ultimate divine reality and mistaking her for an ordinary *devī*. They send the *asura* Sugrīva to ask Caṇḍikā to marry one of the brothers, and Caṇḍikā tells the messenger that she once made a vow to marry only that one who could conquer her in battle. The messenger relates these words to the brothers, who become angry and decide to abduct Caṇḍikā, sending their general, Dhūmralocana, to carry out this mandate. Caṇḍikā kills him and his armies. The brothers, further enraged, send Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and their assorted armies to seize Caṇḍikā. Seeing them, Caṇḍikā becomes angry and Kālī comes forth from Caṇḍikā's rage-filled face. Kālī kills Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa, and their armies in quick and brutal fashion. Śumbha, enraged, enters the battlefield with his extensive forces, and seven personified *śakti*s come forth from five particular *deva*s to help Kālī and Caṇḍikā battle the armies. Caṇḍikā's own *śakti*, Śivadūtī, comes forth as well. The *devī*s destroy the armies, creating such havoc that the great *asura* Raktabīja enters the fray. Raktabīja has the ability to regenerate himself from each drop of blood spilled, and when the *devī*s attempt to kill him each wound simply sprouts new Raktabījas. Kālī drinks Raktabīja's blood, and the *devī*s kill him. At this point the brothers themselves begin to fight the *devī*s, and after a lengthy battle Niśumbha is killed. Śumbha begins to taunt Caṇḍikā by saying that she requires the support of others to win. Caṇḍikā informs him that all the *devī*s are manifestations of herself and the *devī*s return to their resting-places in Caṇḍikā's body, leaving Caṇḍikā standing alone to fight Śumbha.[27] After a long and difficult battle, Caṇḍikā kills Śumbha and order is restored in the universe. The *deva*s

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[27] While the original reading of the text appears to mean that the *devī*s disappeared into the body of Caṇḍikā, J.N. Tiwari notes the existence of what he terms an 'authentic variant,' in which the *devī*s disappear into Caṇḍikā's breasts. This minor difference depends upon how the term *devyāstanau* is understood and printed in a particular edition of the text. As *devyāḥ+tanau*, a more likely reading, the term refers to Caṇḍikā's body. However, read as *devyāḥ stanau*, the term refers to her breasts. This variant appears in both of the printed editions from Bengal. J.N. Tiwari, "An Interesting Variant in the Devī-Māhātmya," *Purāṇa* 25, no. 2 (1983): 235-245.

praise her in a long passage, and she details to them several of her future births, in which she will again restore order by fighting *asura*s. She then disappears, and the text returns briefly to the larger frame narrative of the king, the merchant, and the sage.

This *māhātmya* forms a portion of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which is generally considered by colonial scholars to be "one of the most important, most interesting, and probably one of the oldest works of the whole Purāṇa literature."[28] The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* tells the story of the sage Mārkaṇḍeya, who is approached by Jaimini, a disciple of Vyāsa.[29] Jaimini questions Mārkaṇḍeya about the *Mahābhārata*, and Mārkaṇḍeya sends Jaimini to speak to four wise birds dwelling in the Vindhya mountains. These birds answer Jaimini's four questions in chapters one to nine of the *purāṇa*. The birds then relate a conversation between a son and his father discussing *karma*, *saṃsāra*, and the various worlds of rebirth. In the third section the birds tell Jaimini of a conversation between Mārkaṇḍeya and one of his disciples, dealing primarily with creation and genealogies. This section is interrupted by the *Devī Māhātmya*, which comprises chapters 81 through 93 of the *purāṇa*.[30] In this sense the largest frame narrative of the *Devī Māhātmya* is that of Mārkaṇḍeya, who tells the story of the king and the merchant in order to describe the earlier life of a later Manu. Manus are the kingly progenitors of humanity; each era is ruled by one particular Manu from whom the humans living in that era descend. Mārkaṇḍeya appears only at the very beginning and very end of the *māhātmya*, although as the narrator he is present throughout. Few scholars have looked closely at the placement of the *Devī*

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[28] Moriz Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, vol. 1.2 (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1963[1927]), 490; as cited in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 191-92. Pargiter, who translated the text, also wrote an introduction that remains important for contemporary scholarship. Pargiter, *The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, 1904. R.C. Hazra echoes this sentiment and describes the *Mārkaṇḍeya* as "one of the oldest and most important of the extant Purāṇas." *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975[1940]), 8.
[29] The traditional author of the *Mahābhārata* and the *purāṇa*s, and the compiler of the Vedas.
[30] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 192-3.

Māhātmya in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, although Elizabeth Cecil's recent work seeks to address this neglect.[31]

Overview of *Devī Māhātmya* Scholarship

Although the *Devī Māhātmya* is not itself a *purāṇa*, its position as a narrative embedded within the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* as an integral part of that text requires a brief consideration of *purāṇ*ic literature more generally, as well as a summary of the responses of western scholarship to that literature. The nature of *purāṇa*s as textual material has often contributed to the difficulties of subjecting them to western scholarly approaches, particularly those approaches interested in the specific dates and historical contexts of composition. These difficulties have also impacted studies of the *Devī Māhātmya*, as this text shares several features with *purāṇ*ic literature more generally. The *purāṇa*s are the texts of an immense and complex body of primarily Sanskrit literature, and contain a vast amount of material that is not easily classified or described. Each *purāṇa*, of which there are hundreds, has multiple versions, with different textual recensions and variants in oral recitations, and often material from one *purāṇa* appears in other *purāṇa*s with only minor changes; this "textual flexibility" was generally accepted without anxiety within the Hindu traditions.[32] Within these traditions the *purāṇa*s have often been viewed as being closely connected to the Vedas, expanding upon Vedic ideas and allowing lower castes and women access to these concepts in a *purāṇ*ic form. Both Hindu and western scholarship on the

[31] Elizabeth Ann Cecil, "A New Approach to the Devīmāhātmya: The Greatness of the Goddess in its Purāṇic Context" (master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 2008).
[32] Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa," in *The Hindu World*, eds. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2004), 97. This lack of anxiety marks a difference from the traditional attitude towards the Vedas, which does not allow for any flexibility.

*purāṇa*s have generally, although not unanimously,[33] considered the *pañcalakṣaṇa*, or the five marks, to be the distinguishing feature of a *purāṇa*.[34] The *pañcalakṣaṇa* was first used as a definition for a *purāṇa* by the fifth-century lexicographer Amarasiṃha, and the five marks include a story of universal creation; the recreation of the universe after its destruction; genealogies of various *deva*s, the sun, and the moon; a description of a particular Manu; and the history of the ruling dynasty corresponding to the time period of that particular Manu.[35] The *pañcalakṣaṇa* continues to be used as one of the primary defining traits of a *purāṇa* despite the fact that few extant *purāṇa*s contain all of five topics. The absence of the *pañcalakṣaṇa* in the extant literature contributed to a prevalent idea in western scholarship that these texts were deteriorated versions of earlier texts,[36] a perspective shared by H.H. Wilson, Eugène Burnouf, and Christian Lassen, among others.[37] One of the major arguments used in support of this theory, which at times incorporated the concept of an ‘ur-*purāṇa*’ or a single and original *purāṇa* from which all others were derived,[38] rests upon the sectarian nature of most of the extant *purāṇa*s. Those *purāṇa*s which included a great deal of devotional material to a particular *deva*, often Śiva or Viṣṇu, were considered to be associated with Śaivite or Vaiṣṇavite traditions. Wilson in particular argued that this sectarianism indicated the presence of earlier, non-sectarian texts, and once this principle was adopted more generally it seemed logical that those *purāṇa*s with more

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[33] See, for example, Vans Kennedy, *Researches in the Nature and Affinity of Ancient and Hindu Mythology* (London: Longman, 1931[1831]), 153 n; as cited in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 28.
[34] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 24.
[35] Narayana Rao, “Purāṇa,” 99.
[36] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 38-41.
[37] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 19. Vans Kennedy, a contemporary of Wilson’s, argued strongly against this idea, along with the idea that the *purāṇa*s were of more modern composition and that they had changed from their original forms. *Researches*, 153-155; as cited in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 39-40.
[38] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 41-45.

strongly sectarian components were more modern than others.[39] This idea rested on the assumption that sectarianism was a later characteristic of Hindu traditions, itself a controversial claim.[40]

The theory that the extant *purāṇa*s were deteriorated and overly religious versions of one or more early non-sectarian texts both reflected and reinforced certain attitudes towards the *purāṇa*s present in much, although not all, of the colonial *purāṇ*ic scholarship. Many scholars, including Wilson, viewed the *purāṇa*s as rather unimportant texts, particularly as compared to the Vedas, although Wilson spent a significant portion of his life studying *purāṇ*ic material. Part of the rationale for this generally low opinion of the *purāṇ*ic material comes from comparing the *purāṇa*s to the Vedas, which were written in more refined and elegant Sanskrit. Colonial scholarship often saw the *purāṇa*s as lesser forms of Sanskrit literature, with confusing content and "sloppy and grammatically flawed language."[41] As a *māhātmya*, the *Devī Māhātmya* would have merited similar opinions from early western scholars; for example, Moriz Winternitz once described *māhātmya*s as "inferior literature" even in comparison to *purāṇa*s.[42] Coburn notes that while the *Devī Māhātmya* is rich in narrative and theological power, its "literary merits [...] are not overwhelming,"[43] a courteous way of noting the straightforward and unprepossessing literary style both of the *Devī Māhātmya* and of *purāṇa*s more generally. However, it was the narrative strength and theological importance of the *Devī Māhātmya* that contributed to

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[39] Ibid., 18-20.
[40] See Rocher's brief discussion of this issue, *Purāṇas*, 24.
[41] Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa," 109-110.
[42] Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature,* 511; as cited in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 70.
[43] Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 30.

its high status within the larger Hindu tradition, which was recognised early by colonial scholarship.[44]

In a continuation of earlier scholarship, modern *purāṇ*ic scholarship primarily, although not entirely, involves producing critical editions of individual *purāṇa*s through the application of text-criticism by philological scholars, both western and Indian.[45] Madeleine Biardeau, in particular, questions this approach. She notes that the attempt to create one definitive edition distorts the reality of the *purāṇ*ic tradition since the *purāṇa*s are primarily both oral and local. She argues instead for an approach that recognises each local version to be authoritative to the particular community in which it lives.[46] Rocher also rejects these critical editions, arguing that since the *purāṇa*s are primarily oral texts maintained by recitation, their textual versions are only partial, and thus the standards "of textual criticism make little sense."[47] Greg Bailey has adopted an entirely different approach to *purāṇ*ic study involving a structuralist method, which will be discussed briefly in the Methodology section of this chapter.[48] His approach, while different from the more traditional text-criticism approach, still involves using the texts as written documents rather than in their oral and regional forms. While it seems clear that for many of the *purāṇa*s their existence in oral and local forms is important for an understanding of their role in a particular community's recitational traditions and cosmological understandings, *purāṇ*ic literature has

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[44] For example, Eugène Burnouf, a contemporary of Wilson, noted that within this larger tradition the text shared a similar status to that of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. "Analyse et extrait du Dévi Mahatmyam, fragmens du Markandéya Pourana," *Journal Asiatique* 4 (1824), 24; as cited in Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 193. In 1840 Wilson claimed that the *Devī Māhātmya* was one of the most popular Sanskrit texts among Hindus (*Works*, ed. R. Rost, vol. 1 [London: Trübner, 1862], 68; as cited in Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," 31), and this high status in India ensured that the *Devī Māhātmya* was the second *purāṇ*ic text to be translated into a European language (translated into English in 1823; the first *purāṇ*ic text to be translated into a European language was from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," 31 and note 4).
[45] Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa," 110.
[46] Ibid., 111. See Madeleine Biardeau, "Some More Considerations About Textual Criticism," *Purāṇa* 10, no. 2 (1968): 115-23.
[47] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 99.
[48] Bailey, *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*.

also existed in textual form within Hindu traditions. Textual versions of *purāṇa*s are not only an invention of colonial scholarship, to which the numerous pre-colonial manuscripts can attest. Furthermore, conceiving of the *purāṇa*s as narrative texts may provide new avenues of approach to this material, as Bailey has demonstrated through his structural literary analysis of the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*. However, the methodological issue of studying *purāṇa*s textually rather than in their oral forms is less significant for the *Devī Māhātmya* than for other *purāṇ*ic literature. As Coburn observes, the *Devī Māhātmya* has a "high degree of textual integrity," showing "striking stability" compared to the fluid tendencies of *purāṇa*s more generally.[49] Few variations occur across different manuscripts, and those that do appear are usually fairly minor. This stability allows for the *Devī Māhātmya*'s textual form to be studied without the same anxiety as that produced by studies of textual *purāṇa*s, since the written text of the *Devī Māhātmya* is much closer to the oral and recitational forms used in historical and modern devotional practices.

The history of western *purāṇ*ic scholarship has impacted studies of the *Devī Māhātmya* in a number of ways. The lack of clear authorship or origin for the *purāṇa*s, as well as for the *Devī Māhātmya*, leads to difficulties in assigning firm dates and specific historical contexts to the compositions of these texts. The idea that one could find a specific date of composition for a *purāṇ*ic text, a question raised almost immediately by western scholars who first approached the *purāṇa*s, was difficult to apply successfully to these texts.[50] Yet the desire to date an entire *purāṇa*, even tentatively, remained strong in scholarship and resulted in, as Rocher notes, relatively specific dates given to individual *purāṇa*s even by those who admit the "highly speculative if not impossible" nature of the

[49] Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 8.
[50] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 100; and Narayana Rao, "Purāṇa," 110.

task.[51] The question of historical context is thus difficult to answer, as the attempt to locate the composition of *purāṇa*s within their specific historical contexts is extremely challenging. Many of these difficulties were evident in the previous and necessarily brief discussion of the historical and cultural context of the *Devī Māhātmya*, particularly when considering the *Devī Māhātmya* as a textual artefact in the late classical and early medieval period, as opposed to considering it as an oral artefact used extensively throughout historical and contemporary India. The generally low opinion of *purāṇa*s and *māhātmya*s held by western scholars in the colonial period also influenced *purāṇ*ic scholarship, resulting in a relatively small amount of scholarship focusing on the *purāṇa*s or on the *Devī Māhātmya*, particularly as compared to the scholarship concerning the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, and the *Mahābhārata*. *Devī Māhātmya* scholarship was also impacted by the later date of composition first given to the text, as during the colonial period a greater importance was attached to the idea of antiquity, with the majority of scholarly attention devoted to those texts considered to be older. The sectarian nature of the *Devī Māhātmya* also contributed to this limited scholarship. Despite modern scholarship's dismissal of many of the assumptions noted here, there are only a few recent studies of the *Devī Māhātmya*. These difficulties, along with a growing appreciation for the recitational nature of *purāṇ*ic texts within Hindu communities, have contributed to the modern shift towards using *purāṇa*s as tools in the ethnographic study of their local, regional, and recitational contexts, rather than solely in their critical-edition forms as a means for historical or textual studies. This shift has occurred within studies of the *Devī Māhātmya* as well, with recent scholarship often discussing the text's role in modern recitational practices.

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[51] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 102-103.

Despite the popularity of the *Devī Māhātmya* in India and its importance within *śākta* traditions, extensive studies of it have not often been undertaken by modern western scholars. Only three contemporary English translations exist, those of Vasudeva S. Agrawala, Swami Jagadīśvarānanda, and Thomas Coburn; Coburn's is the most recent.[52] Coburn is the only western scholar to have analysed the text in a significant and thorough way. His primary project, continued throughout the majority of his work on this text, is to understand the motivations and the objectives of the text's representation of ultimate reality as feminine, and to determine the position of this representation within the processes of religious change.[53] Few other modern scholars examine this text in any depth, although many mention it briefly as support or evidence for various studies; for example, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty has used the text to support her work in comparative mythology.[54] Others discuss the text in its historical and literary context; for example, Ludo Rocher and Jan Gonda both review the *Devī Māhātmya* in their work within the series *History of Indian Literature*.[55] Rocher mentions the importance of the text in devotional traditions, noting that it has often been compared to the *Bhagavad Gītā* in importance, and discusses some of the controversies that have arisen in dating the text.[56] Gonda simply narrates the basic storyline of the text, connecting it to historical and modern ritual worship, and he claims that it is one of the oldest documents in the *śākta* traditions.[57] J.N. Farquhar and Teun

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[52] Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *Devī-Māhātmyam: The Glorification of the Great Goddess* (Varanasi: All-India Kashi Raj Trust, 1963); Swami Jagadīśvarānanda, *The DevīMāhātmyam or Śrī Durgā-Saptaśatī: (700 Mantras on Śrī Durgā)*, (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1972); Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*.
[53] See, for example, Thomas B. Coburn, *The Conceptualization of Religious Change and the Worship of the Great Goddess* (Canton: NY, St. Lawrence University Faculty Lecture, 1980); Thomas B. Coburn, "The *Devī-Māhātmya* as a Feminist Document," *Journal of Religious Studies* 8 (1980); *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*; *Encountering the Goddess*; and "Devī: The Great Goddess."
[54] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 81-82.
[55] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 193-196; Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature*, 281-282.
[56] Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 193-196.
[57] Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature*, 281-282.

Goudriaan also examine the text within the context of the history of Sanskrit literature.[58] Several other contemporary scholars have analysed various aspects of the text, rather than the text as a whole; Cynthia Ann Humes has considered the role of the *Devī Māhātmya* in women's experiences of recitation, and has also considered whether or not the text can be viewed as a feminist text by western standards.[59] Hillary Rodrigues discusses the text's role in devotional recitation, particularly with regard to the worship of Durgā in modern India.[60] Tryna Lyons and K.M. McDonald have both considered the text's place in the study of Indian art,[61] and Karline McLain has examined a more modern form of the *Devī Māhātmya*: a re-telling in the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic series.[62] David Kinsley has examined the ways by which the text posits the specific nature of goddesses, a useful source for this project.[63] Most recently, Elizabeth Cecil has examined the ways in which the *Devī Māhātmya* relates to the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.[64] While some scholars do consider narrative in their studies, most notably Cecil, as of yet little serious narrative analysis of the *Devī Māhātmya* has been completed. Aside from Rodrigues' work on the position of the text for conceptions of Durgā, little scholarship exists on the characters of the *Devī Māhātmya*. While the text is often cited in discussions of *devī*s, particularly of the *mahādevī*, scholarship has not often focused on the actual *devī*s in the text. This is

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58 J.N. Farquhar, *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967[1920]); Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature,* History of Indian Literature II, 2 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981).

59 Humes, "Glorifying the Great Goddess;" and Cynthia Ann Humes, "Is the *Devi Mahatmya* a Feminist Scripture?" in *Is the Goddess a Feminist?* eds. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

60 Rodrigues, *Ritual Worship*.

61 Tryna Lyons, "The Simla 'Devī Māhātmya' Illustrations: A Reappraisal of Content," *Archives of Asian Art* 45 (1992): 29-41; K.M. McDonald, "The Sacred Esthetics of Scriptural Illustration: An Analysis of the Devi Mahatmya," (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin – Madison, 1997).

62 Karline McLain, "Holy Superheroine: A Comic Book Interpretation of the Hindu *Devī Māhātmya* Scripture," *Bulletin of SOAS* 71, no. 2 (2008): 297-322.

63 David Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess in the Devī-māhātmya," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 4 (1978).

64 Cecil, "A New Approach."

especially true for studies of Kālī, which frequently cite the *Devī Māhātmya* but do not thoroughly examine either the text or Kālī's position within it.

Overview of Kālī Scholarship

In the most recent compilation of scholarship on Kālī, Rachel McDermott and Jeffrey Kripal's *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, McDermott and Kripal identify four general categories of Kālī studies, arranged somewhat chronologically.[65] The first category extends from the early eighteenth century to the early twentieth century and includes colonial scholarship of Kālī. This scholarship was primarily negative, with much attention paid to Kālī's association with *tantra*, sacrificial rituals at the Kālīghāṭ temple, and her connection to the bandits known in English as the Thugs.[66] Sir John Woodroffe (1865-1936), who also wrote under the pen name Arthur Avalon, was more inclined to defend both Kālī and *tantra*, and he epitomised those few scholars who did not immediately censure these subjects. Woodroffe's work is, however, problematic by the standards of contemporary scholarship. His "cultural, moral, and philosophical biases," which, as McDermott and Kripal claim, contribute to his censorship of sexuality in *tantra* and his self-conscious and contrived attempts at cross-cultural comparison, resulted in a view of western culture as scientific and Indian culture as spiritual. While these prejudices are not particularly surprising given the context in which Woodroffe wrote, such biases, along with the use of sexual ritual and metaphor in *tantra*, contributed to the decline of scholarship on the *tantr*ic Kālī, and these subjects were neglected for nearly half a century

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[65] Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Introducing Kālī Studies," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5-9.

[66] The Thugs, or Thugees, were alleged by the British to be a group of bandits who primarily strangled their victims and who were devoted to Kālī; their practices were supposedly eliminated in the 1830s by the British colonial administration.

after Woodroffe's death.[67] McDermott and Kripal's second category thus begins in the 1960s, and encompasses those works focusing primarily on Kālī in Indian art. These works both influenced and were influenced by the popular western interest in Indian religious traditions at the time, and while they are less scholarly than the writings of earlier writers, they attempt to portray Kālī and *tantra* in a favourable light; Ajitcoomar Mookerjee's *Kali: The Feminine Force* is an important example of this category.[68] The third category identified by McDermott and Kripal, which begins in the 1990s, studies devotees of Kālī through the use of historical, textual, and psychological evidence, and has often focused on Kālī's most famous devotee, the nineteenth-century Bengali religious figure Ramakrishna Paramahaṁsa. Finally, the fourth category has its origins in what is often termed cultural or area studies, first established in the late 1960s, and includes modern approaches as well. David Kinsley, at the time a graduate student, utilised these programs to begin studying Kālī-related material in India, and initiated a multidisciplinary approach to Kālī studies, using history, texts, and ethnographic field research to study the relationship between Kālī and her worshippers. This field was later enriched by other scholars studying different regions in India – and lately, outside of India – and by the inclusion of sources from multiple vernaculars. Modern Kālī studies have begun to incorporate a larger number of theoretical models, derived from various fields including postcolonialism and feminist theory, to understand further what Kālī means to her devotees. This last category can also be discussed with reference to the subjects currently studied by scholars, who focus primarily on *tantra* and ritual worship.

[67] McDermott and Kripal, "Introducing," 6.
[68] Ajitcoomar Mookerjee, *Kali: The Feminine Force* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books), 1988.

The majority of contemporary scholarship concerning Kālī continues to focus on devotees and their practices rather than on Sanskrit textual sources. David Kinsley's general approach to the study of Kālī focused on her role in *tantra* and ritual sacrifice while briefly mentioning some of her more famous myths, and attempted to interpret her meaning and role within the larger Hindu traditions. Kinsley, who pioneered Kālī studies in western academia, focused especially on Kālī's position in *tantra*.[69] Kinsley also traced Kālī's appearances in various *purāṇa*s, as well as in certain iconographical trends, yet it is Kālī's pre-eminence in the *tantra* tradition that is most frequently highlighted in the majority of Kinsley's work. Kinsley also interprets some of Kālī's most distinguishing physical features, including her disheveled hair and lolling tongue, and briefly mentions her role in Bengali devotional poetry.[70] This method informed the greater part of the scholarship that followed Kinsley's work, as it is these areas of focus which have been almost exclusively studied by later scholars. For example, C. Mackenzie Brown's essay "Kālī, the Mad Mother" discusses Kālī's horrific nature by detailing those sacrifices performed to her, by giving an overview of her role in *tantra*, by attempting to interpret what Kālī means both to her devotees and to the larger Hindu traditions, and by drawing attention to her role as a mother within Bengali devotional traditions.[71] Brown's article is an excellent example of the ways in which scholarship has followed Kinsley's approach, as it contains a discussion

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[69] See especially David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[70] See especially David Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000[1975]). See also Kinsley's other articles discussing Kālī, including: "Freedom from Death in the Worship of Kālī," *Numen* 22, no. 3 (1975); "The Portrait of the Goddess;" and "Kālī: Blood and Death Out of Place," in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, eds. John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

[71] C. Mackenzie Brown, "Kālī, the Mad Mother," in *The Book of the Goddess Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion*, ed. Carl Olson (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2002[1983]), 110-123.

of each of the various strands that Kinsley identified as central to Kālī's figure: *tantra*, ritual and sacrificial worship, *bhakti*, and symbolic meaning.

Many scholars have studied Kālī's representation within *tantra*, focusing primarily on her disruptive behaviour and appearance. Generally, these discussions occur in combination with studies of Kālī's role in ritual sacrifice, as these two traditions are highly interconnected. Sarah Caldwell's *Oh Terrifying Mother*, Kathleen M. Erndl's *Victory to the Mother*, Elizabeth Harding's *Kālī: The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar*, and June McDaniel's *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls* all describe various sacrificial rituals performed to Kālī and to similar ferocious goddesses; McDaniel's work includes a thorough description of *tantra* in Bengal.[72] Studying sacrificial ritual includes the study of Kālī-devoted temples; Sanjukta Gupta, for example, has examined the influence of Vaiṣṇava traditions upon Kālīghāṭ, Kālī's primary temple in Kolkata.[73] These studies often contain discussions of Kālī's role in *bhakti*, particularly in the context of Bengali devotional practices and poetry.[74] Psychological and symbolic interpretations of Kālī have also been a focus of study; Jeffrey Kripal's work combining psychoanalysis and Kālī is perhaps the most widely-read.[75] Kripal has also discussed psychoanalysis within modern Kālī-oriented *bhakti*, with particular reference to Ramakrishna Paramahaṁsa.[76] Scholars

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[72] Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of the Goddess Kāḷi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kathleen M. Erndl, *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Elizabeth U. Harding, *Kali: The Black Goddess of Dakshineswar* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998); June McDaniel, *Offering Flowers, Feeding Skulls: Popular Goddess Worship in West Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[73] Sanjukta Gupta, "The Domestication of a Goddess: *Caraṇa-tīrtha* Kālīghāṭ, the *Mahāpīṭha* of Kālī," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 60-79.

[74] See McDaniel, *Offering Flowers*, for example; and Rachel Fell McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[75] See, for example, Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Kālī's Tongue and Ramakrishna: 'Biting the Tongue' of the Tantric Tradition," *History of Religions* 34, no. 2 (1994): 152-189.

[76] Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

have also paid attention to the influence of British colonialism upon Kālī-oriented studies: Cynthia Ann Humes and Hugh B. Urban both contributed articles concerning this subject to Rachel McDermott and Jeffrey Kripal's anthology *Encountering Kālī,*[77] and David Kopf's essay "A Historiographical Essay on the Idea of Kālī" adds to this field.[78] Some recent work has shifted the study of Kālī away from India: Keith E. McNeal and Stephanos Stephanides have both examined Kālī's role in Caribbean culture,[79] for example, and Rachel McDermott has discussed the position of Kālī on the Internet.[80]

While much of this scholarship includes references to Kālī's appearances in various narratives, there has been little serious analysis of her role therein. Neela Bhattacharya Saxena has written a personal and creative account of Kālī's figure throughout multiple historical and textual sources, although Saxena mentions the *Devī Māhātmya* only briefly.[81] Patricia Dold has considered the figure of Kālī in the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa,*[82] yet focuses entirely on Kālī's role in *tantra* as described by this text. Aside from this study, no other scholarship has focused on Kālī's role within one single narrative text. While David Kinsley, for example, has examined multiple *purāṇ*ic myths featuring Kālī in many of his works, this approach focuses on a discussion of symbolism across multiple myths, rather

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[77] Cynthia Ann Humes, "Wrestling with Kālī: South Asian and British Constructions of the Dark Goddess," and Hugh B. Urban, "'India's Darkest Heart': Kālī in the Colonial Imagination," both in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 145-168 and 169-195, respectively.
[78] David Kopf, "A Historiographical Essay on the Idea of Kālī," in *Shaping Bengali Worlds, Public and Private*, ed. Tony K. Stewart (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1989).
[79] Keith E. McNeal, "Doing the Mother's Caribbean Work: On *Shakti* and Society in Contemporary Trinidad," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Stephanos Stephanides, *Translating Kali's Feast: The Goddess in Indo-Caribbean Ritual and Fiction* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000).
[80] Rachel Fell McDermott, "Kālī's New Frontiers: A Hindu Goddess on the Internet," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[81] Neela Bhattacharya Saxena, *In the Beginning IS Desire: Tracing Kali's Footprints in Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Indialog Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2004). See page 66 for her reference to the *Devī Māhātmya*.
[82] Patricia Dold, "Kālī the Terrific and Her Tests: The Śākta Devotionalism of the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

than providing a complete analysis of her role as a character in one narrative.[83] There have also been few examinations of Kālī's role in the *Devī Māhātmya*, despite the likelihood that this text is the first example of Kālī as a fully-fledged character in a narrative text. Coburn has mentioned Kālī in some of his research on the *Devī Māhātmya*, particularly with regard to the etymology of her name and to textual passages referencing her figure prior to the composition of the *Devī Māhātmya*.[84] Several scholars, including Kinsley, regularly refer to the myths of the *Devī Māhātmya* in their discussion of Kālī. The *Devī Māhātmya* has been viewed as an important text within Kālī studies because it presents Kālī's first significant scene in Sanskrit literature, and because many of Kālī's current traits and characteristics can be traced back to this early text. Despite the academic recognition of her significance to this early text, Kālī's role in the *Devī Māhātmya* as a whole has not been thoroughly analysed.

Methodology

This detailed character study of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* contributes to Kālī studies by closely examining the construction of her character in this early text, by situating her character within the literary and theological context of Sanskrit mythology, and by highlighting particular early conceptions of Kālī that are potentially influential to her depictions in later traditions. The majority of studies focusing on Kālī cite her description in the *Devī Māhātmya* in order to provide early evidence of pivotal features in these later descriptions and images, primarily because the *Devī Māhātmya* includes the first extant textual representation of Kālī as a fully developed figure. Enriching scholarly

[83] As another example of approaching through Kālī through multiple texts, Rachel McDermott has studied multiple poems from the Bengali devotional tradition, analysing Kālī's role therein. McDermott, *Mother of My Heart*.
[84] Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*, 108-113.

understandings of Kālī's portrayal in this text contributes to the larger discourse of Kālī studies, as the connections between her traits in the *Devī Māhātmya* and her later ones in *tantra* and *bhakti* traditions become clearer once these early characteristics have been thoroughly examined.

Character is an especially important aspect of Hindu narrative texts, and considering Hindu narratives with respect to their characters provides a useful approach to this type of literature. This project is based primarily upon narrative theories of character, particularly those outlined by Mieke Bal, which contribute to this project by indicating methods of analysis and by providing a more nuanced means of considering characters who do not easily fit traditional methods of approach. Character studies have several avenues of approach; for this project, studies examining saga characters, characterisation, and character types are of particular importance. Narrative theories of character have not often been applied to Hindu narrative literature. Kevin McGrath's character study of Karṇa in the *Mahābhārata* provides an excellent model for this project, as it presents a detailed account of the specific methods that can be used in the analysis of a single character within a Hindu narrative text. This project also considers the place of Kālī's character within the larger context of Hindu narrative literature, with particular attention to the theme of extreme and brutal violence, the Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa*, and the traditional and scholarly classifications of *devī*s and *asura*s. Such methods assume that texts convey meaning to the reader in particular ways, which is an assumption predicated on the theories of reader-response criticism.

The study of Kālī presented by this project borrows concepts from reader-response theory, which allows for the conception of character as a method by which the text purposefully conveys meaning to the reader. This criticism holds that the response of the

reader to a text is what gives a text its meaning and purpose; a text cannot be studied nor understood separately from the effect it has upon its readers. Wolfgang Iser also labels this form of critique ‘reception theory,’ indicating its preoccupation with the means by which a reader responds to a text, and he focuses particularly on the ways in which a text impacts its implied reader.[85] This move away from the author of the text towards the reader characterises the position of reader-response criticism as a theory that uses the concept of the reader to produce textual analysis. Moreover, such a position considers the empirical author of the text, and the author’s possible intentions, to be unnecessary to an analysis of the text. This is particularly useful for a study of *purāṇ*ic literature, whose human authors are unknown. Reader-response theory allows for the conception of an implied author and reader, who are constructed from within the text itself. Umberto Eco’s proposals concerning the nature of textual construction inform this project’s understanding of narrative texts as texts which purposefully shape themselves in certain ways to convey particular meanings to the reader. The construction of a certain character is thus understood to convey intentional meanings, and is therefore deserving of careful study; such a study contributes to the understanding of that particular character in a larger context.

Umberto Eco has proposed that narrative texts construct, maintain, and convey meaning in careful and purposeful ways.[86] He claims that every text “is a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of its work,” indicating that in order to understand a text, a reader must necessarily fill in the gaps deliberately left by the text, which continually hints

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[85] Wolfgang Iser, “Reception Theory,” in *How To Do Theory*, ed. Wolfgang Iser (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

[86] Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Other works of Eco’s that have particularly inspired this approach include: *Experiences in Translation* , trans. Alistair McEwen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); *On Literature*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2004); *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984[1979]); *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006[1995]).

at the fictional world which it constructs and in which it lives.[87] It is in the means by which the reader chooses to fill these gaps that a negotiation between the text and the reader emerges, and from this negotiation meaning is constructed. Readers can and do choose different ways to negotiate these gaps, and Eco argues that this choosing exists even at the level of the individual sentence. Some narrative choices are more credible than others, given the nature of the text, and the model reader will understand that the text is nudging her towards one choice rather than another by means of "a set of textual instructions, displayed by the text's linear manifestation precisely as a set of sentences or other signals."[88] The choices that the model author wants the model reader to make are thus displayed within the text itself, and the instructions for them can be either explicit or implicit. In Eco's theory, the idea of the model author can also be used to characterise a particular textual strategy, which shapes the text in ways designed to encourage the model reader to make certain narrative choices rather than others. He argues that the very nature of a fictional universe, as constructed by a narrative text, requires that the text contain "a set of reading instructions" for the model reader.[89] Closely examining these instructions through a meticulous reading of a narrative text enriches understandings of the text itself.[90] Narrative texts thus require the cooperation of the reader in order to be understood, and this project notes and analyses these moments of necessary cooperation involved in the construction of Kālī's character. While some of Kālī's features are mentioned explicitly, noticing others requires careful study. This project also takes from Eco's theories the idea that a text

[87] Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 3.
[88] Ibid., 15-16.
[89] Ibid., 116.
[90] Eco states this in a particularly personal way, concerning his reading of the novel *Sylvie*: "This experience of re-reading a text over the course of forty years has shown me how silly those people are who say that dissecting a text and engaging in meticulous close reading is the death of its magic." *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 12.

deliberately and intentionally positions its narrative elements, including characters and events, in certain ways, and that a careful reading of the text can expose these intentions. This study focuses on one particular character and examines the choices that the model reader is encouraged to make about her; this provides not only a detailed study of Kālī and an examination of the larger character framework constructed by the *Devī Māhātmya*, but also evidence for the theological intentions of the text.

Reader-response criticism's dismissal of the empirical author to give focus to the textual model author and model reader finds a particular resonance within *purāṇ*ic literature, given the lack of a single author or specific time of composition for the *purāṇa*s as a whole.[91] Examining the particular ways by which a *purāṇ*ic text seeks to shape plots, events, and characters allows for a study of the text with limited regard to the historical context of its composition. As Eco demonstrates, a close reading of a single text provides an enriched understanding both of that text and of the elements within that text. Engaging closely with one text can provide information which an approach involving multiple texts cannot. Previous studies of Kālī in the *purāṇ*ic literature, as discussed above, have primarily worked across multiple narratives, noticing recurrent themes, images, and plots, rather than focusing on a single text. While this method has produced a great deal of substantial and important information, the close study of one narrative text is also a worthwhile methodology. Greg Bailey has convincingly argued that a close analysis of a single *purāṇa* is a novel and valuable approach, providing another method for engaging with *purāṇ*ic literature.[92] While Bailey argues for the structuralist study of an entire *purāṇa*, rather than a portion therein, there are significant justifications for studying the *Devī*

[91] Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods,* 11.
[92] Bailey, *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*, 6; see his Introduction for a more complete discussion.

Māhātmya independently from the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. As previously noted, there are several important similarities between *māhātmya*s and *purāṇa*s, including the strong connections of both texts to various *bhakti* traditions, as well as the fact that both texts mix dialogue with myth in comparable ways.[93] The *Devī Māhātmya* was almost certainly composed independently of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*,[94] and it is important within the larger Hindu traditions as an independent text, particularly in recitational and devotional contexts. Coburn argues that the *Devī Māhātmya* is best studied separately from its *purāṇ*ic context,[95] and he notes that the *Devī Māhātmya* shows some remarkable differences to *purāṇ*ic literature more generally, as it displays a higher level of textual consistency over time and has an immense number of commentaries.[96] This independent existence has allowed a large number of scholars, as previously mentioned, to examine the text separately from the *purāṇa* in which it is embedded. Approaching the *Devī Māhātmya* as an independent text and assuming the text's construction of narrative elements to be intentional allows for a closer study of the text's creation of character, as well as the ways by which the text conveys that creation to the reader.

The specific types of characters within Hindu narrative texts are particularly important to the larger Hindu traditions, as these characters are often divine beings whose actions have significant meaning for theological claims. R.K. Narayan, while discussing *deva*s, *asura*s, *rākṣasa*s, and humans, states that the "pressures exerted by these different types of beings on each other, and their complex relationship at different levels, create the

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[93] Bailey, *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*, 23-24.
[94] While this renders the *Devī Māhātmya* a special case, scholarly opinions differ on whether *māhātmya*s in general constitute independent texts or are integral elements of the *purāṇa*s in which they are embedded. Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 70.
[95] Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya*: *The Crystallization*, 51-53
[96] Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 8. Generally *māhātmya*s are not considered to be basically different from *purāṇa*s; Rocher, *Purāṇas*, 71.

incidents and patterns of our stories."[97] These stories and their characters occupy a major role in many Hindu traditions. Moreover, as many of these characters are also the deities to whom many Hindus are devoted, their positions in narratives are particularly significant and their portrayals influence the traditions devoted to them. Hindu myths often follow a basic pattern beginning with order, moving to disrupted order and the reign of chaos, and then ending with the restoration of order. This concept has its roots in the Hindu conception of time, which posits a cyclical world subject to periodic destruction and re-creation. Within each cycle, the world becomes progressively decayed and corrupted through the expansion of chaotic elements, until it is destroyed and a new world created. Prior to the rise of devotional movements, Hindu traditions often held that it was ritual sacrifice, properly performed, that maintained the integrity of the universe and slowed the progression of disorder. As devotional traditions began to develop, the *deva*s, previously connected with natural phenomena, were identified as those who maintained order against the *asura*s, who were increasingly conceived as the agents of destruction and chaos. Thus in many mythological narratives, the story begins in a time of abundance and peace, which is then threatened by chaotic figures. The destruction of chaos and the returning of the world to order by the *deva*s reaffirms their position as world-sustainers and promotes the theological concept that the world is meant to be orderly but is continually under threat of degradation. It is the characters who move the narrative forwards through this common pattern, which the *Devī Māhātmya* also follows. Approaching Hindu narratives through their characters can thus provide a productive method for the study of these texts. Furthermore, studying a character who disrupts these common associations can provide

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[97] R.K. Narayan, *Gods, Demons, and Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993[1964]), 6-7. The term *rākṣasa* is not easily translated into English; translations can include 'demon' and 'ogre.' While at some periods of time *asura*s and *rākṣasa*s are conflated, in early literature the terms represent separate groups.

some insight into the ways by which Hindu narrative texts organise their characters, as a character who does not neatly fit into any larger group highlights some of the similarities and differences among the groups more generally. The figure of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* is particularly striking for its liminal state between distinct groups of characters, and the *Devī Māhātmya* is a significant text for the development of Kālī's character over time, indicating that a character study of Kālī here provides information both about Kālī more generally and about the other characters in the text. Kālī's character, while explicitly conveyed through a variety of textual devices, is also shaped by her relations with the other characters, including the pressures they exert on one another as well as by the ways in which they are similar and in which they differ.

Approaching Kālī's character in the *Devī Māhātmya* rests primarily on the application of character study in narrative theory. Mieke Bal claims that character is "the most crucial category of narrative, and also [the category which is] most subject to projection and fallacies."[98] Despite the importance of character, Rick Altman notes that few narrative theorists have given extensive attention to the complexity inherent in the idea of character, identifying Seymour Chatman, Gerald Prince, and Mieke Bal as the primary theorists who consider character to a significant depth.[99] Robert Scholes, James Kellogg, and Robert Phelan also provide an in-depth discussion of character, and include considerations of epic and archetypical characters that are particularly applicable to the consideration of Kālī among the other characters in the *Devī Māhātmya*.[100] Seymour Chatman provides a detailed history of literary theory's approach to character, and also

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[98] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009), 113.
[99] Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 14.
[100] Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 40th anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006[1966]),160-206.

notes that character has not been much discussed in literary criticism.[101] He argues that interpreting character requires examining implications and inferring information from them, and promotes an ‘open theory’ approach to character. Characters are thus reconstructed by the reader from explicit or implicit evidence in the text, and the reader achieves this reconstruction by recognising connections between character traits and the cultural world in which those traits are present.[102] Chatman finally argues for a concept of a character as a “paradigm of traits;”[103] his conclusions about traits, character types, and speech-acts will be discussed more fully subsequently. Gerald Prince discusses the means by which to classify characters, including by generic categories, by function, and by textual prominence, or the use of textual space with recourse to a particular element, as well as by the position of character in certain binaries. These binaries include dynamic and static, consistent and inconsistent, and flat and round characters; this last distinction is common in narrative theories about character and can be traced back to E.M. Forster.[104] These classifications are particularly useful to this project and have informed several points about Kālī’s character.[105] The work of theorist Mieke Bal is perhaps the most useful for this project, as she provides a greater depth to the discussion of the ways by which characters can be analysed. She critiques the traditional ‘flat’ versus ‘round’ characterisation, producing a more nuanced view of the literary devices by which a character is constructed. This

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[101] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 107.
[102] Ibid., 116-125.
[103] Ibid., 126.
[104] E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2005[1927]).
[105] Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1982), 72-73; and *Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 12.

alternative method informs a substantial part of this project's method of analysing Kālī's character, and deserves closer examination here.[106]

Forster's distinction between flat and round characters is common in narrative theories of character. Prince defines flat characters as "simple, two-dimensional, [and] endowed with very few traits,"[107] and H. Porter Abbott notes that they engage only in a few predictable actions.[108] Round characters are "multidimensional [and] capable of surprising behaviour,"[109] and are complex to varying degrees.[110] Abbott states that round characters are usually considered to be more important than flat ones because of this depth and complexity.[111] As Bal notes, the characters in fairytales, folktales, and ancient literary narratives, who are almost always flat characters, are often excluded from careful study because of this flatness, even though such characters can still be studied through other approaches.[112] This has particular relevance for Kālī's character, which is clearly flat due to her narrow range of behaviour and selective features but is still complex and nuanced to a greater degree than the characterisation of a flat character would warrant. Some of Kālī's behaviours are in fact surprising, and there is complexity in her figure, which becomes evident once studied in context with other characters. This binary is thus not a useful means of approach for studying the figure of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Bal dismisses almost entirely the characterisation of flat and round, and attempts instead to create a more nuanced framework for understanding the construction of particular characters.[113] She

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[106] Bal, *Narratology*.
[107] Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 12.
[108] H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 133.
[109] Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 12.
[110] Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 133.
[111] Ibid., 134.
[112] Bal, *Narratology*, 115.
[113] Ibid., 119.

proposes that characters are constructed through four main literary devices: repetition, accumulation, relations to other characters, and transformations.[114] As the traits relevant to a character's construction are repeated over the course of the narrative, they become clearer, and it becomes more evident to the reader that a particular trait is foundational for a certain character. Various characteristics also accumulate, causing several features to coalesce and form a complete image of a character. These characteristics are often considered within the context of a character's relations with other characters, where they are usually discussed in terms of similarities and differences. As a flat character Kālī does not change or transform in the course of this narrative, and thus it is the first three of Bal's categories that are relevant for this analysis.

Bal also discusses the ways by which the reader knows which characteristics of a character are of primary importance and which are secondary, using the structuralist idea of semantic axes. While Bal is uncomfortable with this principle because of the problematic nature of binary thought, she maintains that it remains useful for two primary reasons: there is not much else available for character analysis and most readers do indeed categorise semantically.[115] This method is particularly useful for this study's consideration of Kālī in comparison to other characters, as these axes serve to highlight Kālī's unique position in the text. Axes are selected by focusing only on those characteristics that determine the largest number of characters, or on those features which are particularly striking or exceptional, or those traits related to important events. Bal is careful to mention that the selection of semantic axes "involves the ideological position of the analyst and also points at ideological stances represented in the story, and can therefore be a powerful tool for

[114] Ibid., 126-127.
[115] Ibid., 127-131.

critique."[116] Bal notes that the relationships among characters are often discussed in terms of similarities and contrasts, and observes that semantic axes are constructed along these binaries. Although she is uncomfortable with the limitations imposed by the binary thought inherent in these axes, particularly the reduction of a rich field into polarities, these semantic axes do reflect the ways in which readers engage with text, and also provide material for the analysis of character, which is often limited.[117] Moreover, characters can be placed along axes, rather than simply at the ends, to indicate the degree to which they express a particular trait. This provides some nuance to the two-way division. Once these axes are selected, they can be used to map similarities and differences among characters, enabling the analysis to determine particular qualifications of each character. These semantic axes are usually only constructed for the most significant character traits, the relevance of which is determined by the number of characters who can be placed along that axis; this is because of the large number of characteristics usually mentioned in a narrative text. Bal claims that once characters have been analysed with recourse to particular semantic axes, it becomes clear which characters are strongly or weakly marked; characters marked by the same axes in the same way are thus 'synonymous characters,' or "characters with the same content."[118] It is these characters that, in this analysis, function as representations of a character type. The analysis in this project examines prominent character traits within and across general character categories, and compares characters based on their expression of certain pivotal traits, which can be determined by following the idea of semantic axes. Characters who are fundamentally similar in category, function, and expression of traits can be viewed as representations of a particular character type,

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[116] Ibid., 128.
[117] Ibid., 127.
[118] Ibid., 130.

which is developed both by the *Devī Māhātmya* and by the cultural imagination outside of the text. For example, the *asura* characters in the text can be viewed as expressions of the archetypical *asura* character type, which is composed of the traits most prominent in the textual depiction of the *asura*s in the *Devī Māhātmya*. These character types are best developed with reference to their general representations in the extra-textual world, as these representations necessarily influence both their portrayals in the text and the ways in which the textual audiences receive them.

As a final element to her approach, Bal examines the means by which the reader comes to know something about a character.[119] She notes that readers primarily learn about character in two ways: what a character says about itself, or explicit qualifications, and what can be deduced by the actions of the character, or implicit qualifications. Explicit qualifications can also be produced by what other characters say about the character, as well as by what the narrator states about the character. For this analysis of Kālī, what the narrator states about Kālī is of particular importance, as it is through these direct narrative statements that many of Kālī's features are described. While direct narrative statements convey a great deal of information about a character, narratives also contain other significant information and thus contribute to the image of a character held by the reader. The actions of a character are particularly important here, as implicit qualifications are deduced from actions. While Bal primarily considers the qualifications deduced from standard human actions, such as the deserter who, by deserting, may be qualified as a pacifist, the implicit qualifications thus deduced in the *Devī Māhātmya* serve to communicate significant information about Kālī.[120] The study of character in general

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[119] Ibid., 131-132.
[120] Ibid., 115.

narrative theory is often closely associated with action, since it is through successive acts that a character becomes identifiable as a single character.[121] These actions often reveal something about the character itself.[122] This analysis of Kālī thus includes both what the text directly states about her character as well as what her actions indicate about her character. Bal notes that these sources of information, explicit and implicit qualifications, can be used to classify a particular character based on "the degree of emphasis with which [the character] is qualified."[123] This emphasis is determined by the frequency of the qualification. By combining these emphasised qualifications with a consideration of the semantic axes relevant for a particular character's characterisation, it is possible to devise a more plausible and nuanced character classification than through the use of the older dichotomy of flat and round.[124] In this project's analysis of Kālī, Kālī's characteristics are first discussed with a view to their emphasis and frequency, which provides a fuller discussion of her figure, and are then examined in context with other characters to provide a classification similar to that described by Bal.

This classification also suggests the more standard discussion of type in narrative theory, which defines a "static character whose attributes are very few and who constitutes a paradigm case of a given quality, attitude or role."[125] Examining a character who is best described as a type is more successfully accomplished with recourse to the methods described above, as a more traditional appeal to a character's inner life is of little use to such characters. Abbott suggests that since all characters, no matter how round, can never match the complexity of actual persons, all characterisation involves a flattening of some

[121] Altman, *A Theory of Narrative*, 15.
[122] Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 131.
[123] Bal, *Narratology*, 132.
[124] Ibid., 132.
[125] Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 101.

kind, which often results in a characterisation by type. Constructing character types thus necessarily flattens narrative figures, even if still managing to incorporate a great deal of complexity.[126] Types are thus considered to be an inherent feature in the representation of character. Examining Kālī through a consideration of both her and the other characters as types provides more information about the text's construction of Kālī's figure, although her character is more complex than that of a traditional flat character.

The idea of literary figures or character types is a valuable method of interpretation with respect to the character of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as the construction of her character becomes clearer once examined in context with the other characters in the text. Both western and Indian literary theories discuss the nature of character types, although neither has discussed these types with respect to the *Devī Māhātmya*, or to *purāṇ*ic literature more generally. However, as the characters in Indian mythological literature are often conceived of in paradigmatic or archetypical form, considering them as character types enables this analysis to use a vocabulary based in western literary theory, which enriches understandings of these characters' representations in textual forms.

In his *Dictionary of Narratology,* Gerald Prince defines character types in one short sentence: a character type is a "static character whose attributes are very few and who constitutes a paradigm case of a given quality, attitude, or role."[127] Prince's examples of such types – the braggart, the miser, the *femme fatale* – are relevant only to the type of literature he discusses, but the idea of types can be applied to the characters in the *Devī Māhātmya* as well. Many of the characters in this text conform to the character type describing their entire character group: an *asura*, for example, constitutes the qualities

[126] Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction*, 136-137.
[127] Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 101.

common to all the *asura*s, such as anger, arrogance, and the unwillingness to remain in his proper place in the cosmos. As Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg note, considering a character as a type indicates that the character is considered less as an individual and more as a part of the larger textual framework, which may be theological, referable to a cultural scheme outside of the text, or a part of the narrative itself.[128] Thus the character of an *asura* in the *Devī Māhātmya* can be understood with reference to these larger frameworks, including the theological meaning of *asura*s, their place in Hindu myths as frequent de-stabilisers of the cosmos, and their role in this text as the enemies of the *deva*s. Instead of discussing character types in detail, Bal considers the concept of a referential character, which is a character who clearly fits into a particular place in a cultural frame of reference; the reader's understanding of that figure is thus mostly determined by the expectations produced by that frame of reference in contrast with the full depiction of the character in the text.[129] This concept also has merit for the study of the figures in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as these characters have cultural existences outside of the text, which influence their depiction within it; where they differ from that cultural expectation is noteworthy.

Prince notes that it is possible to classify characters based on their generic categories, their function in the text,[130] and their textual prominence.[131] This project's analysis of multiple characters thus begins by discussing characters in their common groups: *deva*s, *devī*s, and *asura*s. These groups have general functions in the structure of Hindu myths, as discussed previously, and these functions influence their depictions in the

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[128] Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 204.
[129] Bal, *Narratology*, 122.
[130] This concept is based upon the work of Vladimir Propp and others, with reference to folk literature. See Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, trans. Ariadna Y. Martin and Richard P. Martin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[131] Prince, *Narratology*, 72.

Devī Māhātmya. These preliminary classifications are then further analysed by discussing the similarities and dissimilarities between characters with respect to certain traits. As Chapter Two will demonstrate, with respect to Kālī and particular characteristics, the conglomeration of certain traits is integral to a character's realisation in a text. Seymour Chatman notes that in a narrative, traits are identified as the adjectives labelling the individual qualities of a character that persist throughout a part of or the whole of the text. While he claims that the reader will recognise these traits with reference to their existences in the real world, these traits can also be identified by referring to the cultural imagination in which a narrative lives.[132] Chatman also notes that the repetition of a trait is critical to a reader's reception of it, as narrative "audiences do not perform statistical analyses, but their evidence is empirical."[133] Thus the repetition of a particular trait for one or more characters is an integral part of the reader's awareness of those characters. In this project's analysis, character types are constructed with recourse to repetitive character traits, noting where these traits occur within and across character groups and analysing the characters in context with one another; Bal's semantic axes are useful here. Certain characters are clearly more textually prominent than others; this prominence plays a role in the determination of character types and the relative status between characters within a general category. The discussion of Kālī's character as constructed through the repetition and accumulation of certain traits and as constructed through her relationship with the other characters in the text are thus interconnected. These methods allow for a discussion of character through analysing direct narrative statements, actions, and relations with others, allowing the reader

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[132] Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 125.
[133] Ibid., 122.

to round out Kālī's character through a close reading, rather than through the more common examination of a character's inner life or motivations.

These methods of analysis do, however, face two significant problems. First, it is not immediately clear that Kālī is a character in this narrative, instead of an actor. As Bal notes, a character can be understood as "the effect that occurs when a figure is presented with distinctive, mostly human characteristics."[134] A character exists as a "complex semantic unit" at the level of the narrative, or sujet, which expresses the narrative construction and depiction of events;[135] an actor occupies a structural position at the level of the story, or fabula, which is simply the order in which the events of the narrative occur.[136] This distinction suggests that Kālī is better understood as an actor in the fabula rather than as a character in the sujet, because her position is often functional and much of it depends upon the structural positioning of other actors in the text. However, Prince claims that there are two particular traits that distinguish a character from an actor, or a 'logical participant.' First, the character must be endowed with certain human traits and engage in certain human-like activities, such as speaking. Second, the character must be "foregrounded at least once in the narrative rather than relegated to the background and made part of a general context or setting."[137] By this analysis, Kālī can be considered as a character, rather than simply as an actor, as she speaks, yells, and kills, and on two separate occasions is placed firmly in the foreground of the narrative. Furthermore, as Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg point out, a "simply conceived character, in a narrative calculated so as to project the qualities of that character starkly and vividly, can achieve profundity of

[134] Bal, *Narratology*, 112.
[135] Ibid., 113.
[136] Ibid., 112. Bal defines the fabula as the 'deep structure' of the narrative, 181.
[137] Prince, *Narratology*, 71.

meaning and impact without complexity or richness."[138] These kinds of characters are often found in sagas and epics, and their characterisations are marked by economy: they have no attributes that do not relate to their actions. This creates a powerful representation. These understandings of character, in particular those characters found in sagas and epics, allow for a close analysis of Kālī as a character in her portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya*.

This justification of Kālī as a character, rather than simply as an actor, still leaves a problem for this approach. It remains unclear whether Kālī as a *devī* is sufficiently anthropomorphic to be analysed as a character, particularly since there is a clear distinction within Hindu traditions between divine figures and humans. Humans are wholly different from *deva*s and *devī*s, and it is clear that, within the larger Hindu traditions, divine figures are not meant to be understood or considered in the same way that humans consider themselves or other humans. Wendy Doniger notes that Hindu gods are "a class of beings *by definition* totally different from any other; they are symbols in a way that no human being […] can ever be."[139] Narrative theory is generally designed to discuss only certain kinds of characters, who are almost exclusively human or human-like, who often appear in modern literature, and who have a rich inner life; clearly, Kālī does not fit into this category. Part of the solution to this issue rests in using the approaches outlined by Mieke Bal, particularly the concept of semantic axes as applied to character types, and also by Kevin McGrath, an account of whose work is detailed subsequently. These methods look to direct narrative statements and implications based on a character's actions rather than psychological evaluations of a character's emotions or motivations. This follows the understanding of characters in sagas and epics as laid out by Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg,

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[138] Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 173.
[139] Wendy Doniger, *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit*, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975). 19-20; emphasis in original.

who note that in sagas the thoughts of characters are never analysed and the characters are instead constructed solely by their words and actions, along with direct narrative statements concerning them.[140] Umberto Eco also analyses literature involving characters traditionally understood as 'flat;' in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* he occasionally uses fairy tales, usually well-known western tales such as 'Hansel and Gretel' and 'Little Red Riding Hood,' as examples to illustrate his claims about textual authors and model readers.[141] Such approaches are valuable to a study of mythological Hindu figures, whose motives and emotions, if indeed they have them, are meant to be inscrutable to human understandings. The exceptions to this trend of inscrutable deities are, in the *Devī Māhātmya*, the theme of anger, which features heavily in the characterisations of several figures, including Kālī, and the theme of haughtiness, which is displayed both by Kālī and by various *asura*s. This analysis uses these qualities to draw conclusions about Kālī's similarities and dissimilarities to various other characters. By approaching Kālī's character through the study of direct narrative statements and actions, it is possible to construct a character study of her figure despite her non-human status.

The second challenge of applying narrative theory to the *Devī Māhātmya* is that it is not immediately clear that western ideas about character in narrative, or about narrative texts themselves, should be applied to Hindu narrative texts. Western concepts of character and narrative may not necessarily translate effectively when studying such texts; approaching these texts through narrative theory can result in the neglect of certain elements or connections, or in the misunderstanding of certain points. As Patricia Greer points out, such approaches run the risk of anachronism, as these lenses are not

[140] Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 172-173.
[141] Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. See pages 8, 10, 27, 77, and 107.

contemporaneous with the time and context of a particular Indian text.[142] However, Greer, who considers *itihāsa* as literature, also argues that reading the *Mahābhārata* as narrative allows for the application of literary theory to a study of the text, which provides further information about both the *Mahābhārata* and the characters within it. Applying narrative theory can thus supply significant information about a text and, for this study, can provide a relatively new way of approaching Kālī-related material. Previous scholars have uncovered valuable information by closely studying Hindu narrative texts, suggesting that such methods afford useful approaches to this kind of literature. Arti Dhand's close study of Sītā in Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa, for example, applies reader-response criticism to the text in order to determine what the character of Sītā promotes as *strīdharma*, or womanly duty, and illuminates Sītā's complexity and depth.[143] Much of the more recent scholarship considering Indian texts as literature have focused on the *Mahābhārata*. Greer notes that the work of Georges Dumézil, Madeleine Biardeau, and Alf Hiltebeitel challenges the assumption that the *Mahābhārata* must be analysed with recourse to the concept of an 'epic core,' around which layers have accreted over time.[144] These challenges have allowed for approaches which view the text as a literary whole; David Shulman addresses the text in this way, as have David L. Gitomer and Patricia Greer, among others.[145] These studies indicate that approaching a Hindu text as a narrative and literary whole can augment

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[142] Patricia Meredith Greer, "Karṇa Within the Net of the *Mahābhārata*: Reading the *Itihāsa* as Literature," (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2002), 45.
[143] Arti Dhand, "Women in Hinduism: Ambiguities in the Characterization of Sītā in Vālmīkī's Rāmāyaṇa," (master's thesis, University of Calgary, 1992).
[144] Greer, "Karṇa Within the Net of the *Mahābhārata*," 34-42. Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968-1973); Madeleine Biardeau, *Études de Mythologie Hindoue: Tome I: Cosmogonies Purāṇiques* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1981); Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976).
[145] See, for example, David Shulman, "On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (1994): 1-29; and David L. Gitomer, "Rākṣasa Bhīma: Wolfbelly among Ogres and Brahmans in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the *Veṇīsaṁhāra*," in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2007[1991]).

understandings of that text in a way that the older philological approaches cannot. Most of the studies focusing on the *Mahābhārata* do not address the construction of a single character within the text, although there are two notable exceptions: Greer's study of Karṇa in her doctoral dissertation and Kevin McGrath's approach to the same character in his recent book. This latter provides a method for approaching the figure of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*. While Kālī has often been studied with recourse to ritual sacrifice, devotional worship, and iconography, a close study of Kālī in narratives, particularly this early one, provides Kālī studies with new concepts and directions for further research.

Kevin McGrath's detailed analysis of Karṇa in the *Mahābhārata* gives an excellent model for the study of one character within a single Hindu narrative text.[146] While there are several differences between his work and this thesis, in particular in the choice of text and the type of character analysed, many of his methods inform this study of Kālī, particularly those analyses in Chapter Two of this thesis. McGrath divides his analysis into five main sections, the first four of which serve as methodological guides for this project. He discusses Karṇa's storyline within the text and the significance of Karṇa's name to his overall identity, and analyses Karṇa's relationships with three other significant characters, examining the parallel actions, similes, and descriptive terms between the figures.[147] In the third section he analyses six important dialogues in which Karṇa participates, examining the ways by which Karṇa's words and speech patterns demonstrate certain aspects of his character.[148] He also looks closely at the pattern in the relationships between heroes and

[146] Kevin McGrath, *The Sanskrit Hero: Karṇa in Epic Mahābhārata*, Brill's Indological Library, 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
[147] Ibid., Chapters Two and Three.
[148] Ibid., Chapter Four.

sons in the larger epic.[149] In a similar fashion to McGrath's work, this thesis discusses Kālī's physical characteristics and attributes in close detail and compares her to the other characters in the *Devī Māhātmya*, thereby indicating some of the character patterns evident in the text. This project also focuses on Kālī's speech-acts, although the focus has been expanded to include the entirety of the sounds she produces, both orally and physically. In a departure from McGrath's approach but in keeping with trends from narrative theory, this project considers the role of textual space in the construction of Kālī's character, and the significance of the amount and the quality of the space given to Kālī for her position and status in the text. This textual space is then examined to determine which aspects of Kālī's character are most important to the text; this can be analysed by noting which aspects are most frequently highlighted and by analysing their connections to those actions of Kālī's that are particularly important to the overall narrative. Discussing Kālī in context with other characters also draws upon McGrath's approach, and involves examining the attributes and behaviours of these other characters, particularly when they display a textual connection to Kālī. Chapter Three also considers Kālī as a paradigmatic character, incorporating ideas about character types from both Indian aesthetic theory and western narrative theory, and draws upon some of McGrath's conclusions about Karṇa as a paradigmatic hero for inspiration.[150]

While McGrath's approach demonstrates the potential applicability of western models to Indian narrative texts, it does not fully solve the problems raised by studying a cultural artefact through the lenses of another culture. As Greer argues, however, approaching an Indian narrative text as literature resonates within the Indian literary

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[149] Ibid., Chapter Five.
[150] See in particular McGrath, *The Sanskrit Hero*, Chapter Six.

traditions themselves; this is particularly relevant to a consideration of *rasa* theory, which questions, as does modern western literary theory, not only what a text means but also what a text does, and the means by which it does so.[151] Resolving this methodological issue thus requires a discussion of the text or of a character by situating it within particular Indian literary contexts. As Ronald Inden argues, a text properly belongs to a larger textual tradition, in which it is intentionally placed in relation to other texts through engaging in "criticism, appropriation, repetition, refutation, amplification, abbreviation, and so on."[152] To this end, this project utilises concepts and theories from the larger Sanskrit literary tradition in order to augment understandings of the ways by which the *Devī Māhātmya* posits the character of Kālī. The analysis of Kālī as an individual character, which focuses primarily on her violent and gruesome nature, includes a discussion of extreme violence as a theme in Sanskrit narrative literature. This section discusses primarily the metaphor of sacrifice in battle by reading Kālī's violent behaviour in context with the massacre in the *Sauptikaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. This particular text provides a valuable comparison with Kālī's own violence, as the *Sauptikaparvan* is extremely violent, conflates sacrifice and battle in a way echoed by the *Devī Māhātmya*, and contains one of Kālī's earliest textual references prior to her development as a character in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Comparing these two textual events serves to give a broader frame of reference for Kālī's violence in the *Devī Māhātmya*. This section of the analysis also includes a discussion of *rasa* theory, with particular reference to the *rasa*s of the disgusting, the terrifying, and the furious, to situate further Kālī's gruesomeness in its literary context. While *rasa* theory is

[151] Greer, "Karṇa Within the Net of the *Mahābhārata*," i, 4. See Chapter One in total for a more complete argument for the applicability of these methods to the *Mahābhārata*.
[152] Ronald Inden, "Introduction: From Philological to Dialogical Texts," in *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*, eds. Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

primarily used to analyse Sanskrit *kāvya*, or poetics and drama, it is also a useful interpretive tool for narrative texts. Anne Monius uses *rasa* in order to interpret South Indian Śaivite hagiographic material written in Tamil, arguing that the status of the *Tiruttoṇṭarpurāṇam*, or *Periyapurāṇam*, as *kāvya* requires that its themes, particularly those of violence, be understood within their literary contexts.[153] Greer employs *rasa* as an interpretive tool in her study of the *Mahābhārata* with successful results, despite the text's position as *itihāsa* rather than as *kāvya*.[154] Sthaneshwar Timalsina applies *rasa* to *tantr*ic literature in order to provide a framework for those texts, and she argues that Indian aesthetic theories provide a deeper insight into *tantr*ic traditions and practices.[155] In the *Devī Māhātmya*, Kālī functions to evoke the *rasa*s of disgust, dread, and terror; Kālī's violence and repulsiveness are better understood within this context of Indian aesthetics. This is true despite the fact that the *Devī Māhātmya* is neither *kāvya* nor *itihāsa*; arguments demonstrating the applicability of both western and Indian literary theories to those genres are thus not immediately relevant to this text. However, the *Devī Māhātmya* also arises from a literary culture in which violence and the disgusting or repulsive are present, and which uses these themes, particularly those of *rasa*, to indicate literary sophistication and skilled composition. Examining Kālī's portrayal in the text with recourse to these larger literary themes exposes elements of Kālī's character not immediately recognisable, contributing to this project's objective of expanding understandings of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*.

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[153] Anne Monius, "Love, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Disgust: Śaivas and Jains in Medieval South India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004), 116.
[154] Greer, "Karṇa Within the Net of the *Mahābhārata*," 47 onwards.
[155] Sthaneshwar Timalsina, "Metaphor, *Rasa*, and *Dhvani*: Suggested Meaning in Tantric Esotericism," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 19 (2007): 134-162.

In the second part of the analysis, which is undertaken in Chapter Three, Kālī is considered within the context of the larger character framework of the text. The idea of character types, which is both a western and an Indian concept, is used to extend this project's understanding of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*, and of the *Devī Māhātmya*'s conception of *deva*s, *devī*s, and *asura*s. This section of the analysis seeks to classify the *devī*s in the text according to both textual positioning and traditional Hindu ideas about *devī*s, and analyses Kālī's relationships with these types. Bhānudatta's *Rasamañjarī* discusses the types of characters found in Sanskrit poetry,[156] as does Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which also discusses their characterisations and roles.[157] These texts contribute concepts and details to this analysis' consideration of characters in Indian texts, and provide a format for establishing the character types of *devī*s rather than of humans; the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is particularly helpful for such considerations, as it discusses the non-human characters of *deva*s and *rākṣasa*s as well. Establishing character types also requires a discussion of the ways by which the larger Hindu traditions conceive of *devī*s more generally; the work of David Kinsley and the anthologies of John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff are invaluable here.[158] The works of Hillary Rodrigues and W.E. Hale on *asura*s, as well as N.N. Bhattacharyya's study of Indian demonology, contribute significantly to the construction of Kālī's particular character type, as this type contains within it certain *asur*ic elements.[159] Kālī's position as the type of the paradigmatic *asur*ic *devī* – and perhaps of the *mahāsurī* –

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[156] Bhānudatta, *"Bouquet of Rasa" & "River of Rasa,"* trans. Sheldon Pollock, The Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
[157] Bharata, *The Nāṭyaśāstra: English Translation with Critical Notes*, trans. Adya Rangacharya (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Pvt. Ltd., 1996[1986]).
[158] David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997[1986], and *The Ten Mahāvidyās*; Hawley and Wulff, eds., *Devī: Goddesses of India* and *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*.
[159] Hillary P. Rodrigues, "Asuras and Daityas," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Hale, *Ásura- in Early Vedic Religion*; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon* (Delhi: Manohar, 2000).

points towards both Kālī's position in the text and the position of the text itself within the larger movements of cultural process and religious change identified by Coburn. While these approaches to character have developed in different traditions, the examples of Bharata and Bhānudatta's conceptions of character indicate that these western approaches are not irrelevant to a discussion of Indian literature, and can lend a vocabulary and theoretical paradigms useful for the analysis of characters in Indian literary texts. These considerations provide a more secure foundation for this project's overall method, as they indicate the ways in which this western-style analysis fits within the larger traditions of Hindu narrative literature.

Concluding Remarks

Considering Indian texts as literature and mythological figures as characters is not without precedence, and the application of western and Indian literary theories to the portrayal of such characters clearly supplements scholarly understandings of them. Since neither the *Devī Māhātmya* nor the figure of Kālī more generally have been analysed through these lenses, such an analysis contributes to scholarly knowledge of Kālī, particularly of early textual conceptions of her character, as well as to the potential place of both Kālī and this text within the larger cultural processes of religious change with reference to *devī*s and the burgeoning idea of the *mahādevī*. Kālī's fundamental characteristics as described by this text remain important aspects of her textual representations throughout Hindu literary traditions, and her relationship to the *mahādevī* in the *Devī Māhātmya* indicates Kālī's position in the text as the paradigmatic *asur*ic *devī*.

Chapter Two: Gruesome, Violent, & Enraged

The *Devī Māhātmya* posits anger, gruesomeness, and violence as fundamental aspects of Kālī's character through a variety of textual cues, including the repetition and accumulation of features explicitly and implicitly indicating these traits within the text itself. Both direct narrative statements and intratextual symbolism support this claim. The themes of anger, gruesomeness, and violence are common tropes within the literary corpus in which this text exists, and the specific themes of sacrificial violence in epic literature, as well as the expressions of the wrathful and the disgusting in Sanskrit poetics, are particularly relevant to discussions of these themes within the *Devī Māhātmya*. These foundational characteristics are evident both in Kālī's physical appearance and in her behaviour in battle, as well as in the sounds she produces. This chapter begins with a summary of Kālī's storyline within the *Devī Māhātmya* and moves to a detailed description and analysis of her portrayal within the text. This portrayal is analysed with recourse both to narrative theory and to certain themes within Sanskrit literature more broadly. The traits of anger, gruesomeness, and violence remain pivotal to Kālī's character in the vast majority of the literary traditions in which she is present, including other *purāṇ*ic narratives, *tantr*ic texts, and *bhakti* poetry. Kālī's position in the text is also constructed through the use of certain literary devices, including textual space and the idea of narrative essentiality. By analysing these devices, along with Kālī's more explicit characteristics, both her character and her importance to the narrative are made evident.

Kālī's Story

Kālī first appears in the third episode of the *Devī Māhātmya*, in which the *asura* brothers Śumbha and Niśumbha take over rulership of the three worlds and the *deva*s call

on Caṇḍikā for assistance. This episode is composed of books 5 through 12 of the text, which itself numbers thirteen books. In the early part of the battle Śumbha and Niśumbha send their generals, along with vast armies, to abduct Caṇḍikā; she kills them quickly and easily. In the seventh book, the generals Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa go forth to the battlefield, along with immense numbers of *asura* soldiers, and upon seeing them Caṇḍikā becomes enraged. In her wrath her face turns black, and Kālī comes forth from Caṇḍikā's forehead. Kālī swiftly and brutally kills the armies of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, who then attack her with arrows and discuses. Kālī swallows their weapons, mounts Caṇḍikā's lion, and decapitates the two *asura*s with her sword. She presents their heads to Caṇḍikā, who gives Kālī the epithet 'Cāmuṇḍā.'

In the eighth book Śumbha comes to the battlefield, along with many thousands of *asura* troops, and *śakti*s come forth from the bodies of the watching *deva*s to aid Caṇḍikā and Kālī in the battle. In the first half of this book Kālī plays a minor role and is only briefly mentioned; she roars loudly and kills *asura* soldiers, most often by devouring them. In the second half of the eighth book, she battles the *asura* Raktabīja, whose regenerative properties render him nearly indestructible. From each drop of his blood that lands on the ground, another Raktabīja, with the same regenerative properties, springs forth. While the other *devī*s are helpless, as their weapons only draw more blood, Kālī drinks the original Raktabīja's blood and eats the cloned versions. Caṇḍikā pierces Raktabīja with many weapons while Kālī drinks his blood and eventually he falls to the ground, dead and bloodless.

In the ninth book Kālī continues to devastate the *asura* armies while producing loud noises, but she does not play any notable role in this portion of the narrative. At the

beginning of the tenth book she and the other *devī*s return to the body of Caṇḍikā and have no further action in the text.

Kālī's Portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya*: The Aesthetics of Revulsion & Wrathfulness

The primary characteristics of Kālī's character in the *Devī Māhātmya* are her gruesomeness, both in physical appearance and in her extraordinary capacity for violence, and her thematic connections to anger. The text constructs Kālī's figure through the repetition and accumulation of statements that support these characteristics, particularly for her grisly physical form and her violent behaviour. Her textual connections to anger are more subtle, although they play a pivotal role in her relationships with other characters in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as discussed in Chapter Three. This section will begin with a discussion of Kālī's description in the *Devī Māhātmya*, noting the ways by which the text uses certain narrative techniques to construct Kālī's character as especially disgusting. A brief inquiry into the *rasa* theory of Sanskrit poetics is valuable here, as the literary depiction of the gruesome or disgusting is not unique to Kālī or to the *Devī Māhātmya*, and a discussion of these themes in the larger Sanskrit tradition sheds light upon the construction of Kālī's character in this text. Such a study also allows the role of anger in the formation of Kālī's character to become evident, and this trait is foundational to her character both in the *Devī Māhātmya* and in other literary traditions.

Much of Kālī's portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya* is conveyed through direct narrative statements detailing her external form, as well as through the accumulation and repetition of certain physical traits, such as her gruesome mouth or dark skin. Kālī's character is shaped primarily by these external characteristics, and the text does not address her inner life or the possible motivations for her behaviour. This is not uncommon for

mythic characters, who are often described as 'flat' in the traditional binary developed by E.M. Forster, as they lack the inner complexity and depth of 'round' characters.[1] Kālī's physical description thus conveys a substantial amount of her character. This kind of characterisation is often found in the narrative portraits of the main characters of sagas, as described by Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg.[2] The narrative identities of such characters depend on a few key characteristics, and their descriptions consist almost entirely of a few sentences immediately following their entrances into the text. Similarly, Kālī's entrance into the text directly precedes a few lines of pure physical description. This description is enhanced only slightly by later descriptors in the seventh book. Later mentions of pivotal physical features, such as Kālī's mouth or weapons, act to reinforce this initial description. The rest of her character is constructed by her relationships with other characters, as discussed in Chapter Three, and her actions, particularly in battle. These actions, which are generally grisly, violent, and chaotic, serve to reinforce these same traits as presented in her initial description, and her relationships are determined by the presence or absence of these characteristics in the other characters of the *Devī Māhātmya*. This initial description is thus crucial to understanding the construction of Kālī's character.

Kālī's entrance into the text occurs in the seventh book, which is almost entirely devoted to Kālī's description and to her battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. Her arrival into the narrative is rather unexpected and spectacular:

> From the knitted brows of [Caṇḍikā's] forehead's surface immediately
> Came forth Kālī, with her dreadful face, carrying sword and noose.[3]

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[1] See E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Penguin Books, 2005[1927]), 73-81. See also Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 115.

[2] Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 40th anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See especially page 172.

[3] DM 7.5, Sanskrit: *bhrukuṭīkuṭilāttasya lalāṭaphalakād drutam / kālī karālavadanā viniṣkrāntāsipāśinī*. The word 'dreadful' is here translating *karāla*, which may also be translated as 'formidable,' 'dreadful,' or,

In the following verse the text describes Kālī as looking "utterly gruesome" and as having "emaciated skin."[4] The word *kālī* indicates that she is black in colour, which is consistent with a later metaphor likening her to a "black cloud."[5] She has a "widely gaping mouth," which is "terrifying," contains a "lolling tongue" and "fill[s] the directions with roars."[6] She also has "sunken, reddened eyes."[7] Kālī's body is covered by only a "tiger skin," and her sole adornment is "a garland of human heads."[8] She also carries a number of weapons. In this first description she is said to carry a "sword," a "noose" and a "skull-topped staff."[9] She is later described as "ripping open some [*asura*s] with strokes of her spear," indicating a total of four weapons.[10] Her physical description is augmented later in the seventh book, where she is referred to as a "dread-eyed female."[11] Her mouth is highlighted again two verses later, where "her ugly teeth [are] gleaming within her dreadful mouth."[12] Her teeth are also referred to as "fangs."[13] This is the entirety of Kālī's physical description in the

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interestingly, 'having a gaping mouth and projecting teeth.' Monier-Williams notes that *karālavadanā* is an epithet of Durgā. M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskṛit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2004[1899]), 255, col. 2, s.v. "*karāla*." All quotations are from Thomas B. Coburn's translation in *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation* (Albany: SUNY, 1991). Sanskrit terms are generally given only for those direct quotations explicitly describing Kālī.

[4] DM 7.6, Sanskrit: *atibhairavā* and *śuṣkamāṃsa*, respectively.

[5] DM 7.17, Sanskrit: *ghanodaram*; *kālī* is the feminine of *kāla*, meaning 'black' or 'of a dark colour.'

[6] DM 7.7, Sanskrit: *ativistāravadanā*, *bhīṣanā*, *jihvālalana*, and *nādāpūritadiṅmukhā*, respectively.

[7] DM 7.7, Sanskrit: *nimagnāraktanayanā*.

[8] DM 7.6, Sanskrit: *dvīpicarman* and *naramālā*, respectively.

[9] DM 7.6, Sanskrit: *asi*, *pāśa*, and *khaṭvāṅga*, respectively.

[10] DM 8.31, Sanskrit: *śūlapātavidāritān*. While the number of Kālī's arms is not mentioned in this text, many extant representations of her include four arms (although representations exist which present different numbers of arms, particularly ten). The popular Dakṣiṇākālī, for example, has four arms, while Mahākālī boasts ten arms. See June McDaniel, "Kālī," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 591. It is perhaps possible to infer from the stated number of weapons in the *Devī Māhātmya* that Kālī is implicitly described as having four arms, but this is uncertain.

[11] DM 7.16, Sanskrit: *bhīmākṣīm*.

[12] DM 7.18, Sanskrit: *karālavaktrāntardurdarśanojjvalā*.

[13] DM 7.14, Sanskrit: *daṃṣṭrā*.

narrative. While this description forms a brief portion of text, it succeeds in conveying a significant amount of information concerning Kālī's character.

Kālī's physical gruesomeness is clearly apparent from this short description, in which every characteristic mentioned serves to augment her overall grisly and hideous appearance. In summary, her body is emaciated and dark, and her face is terrible, with deep-set red eyes and a horrible wide mouth. Her tongue lolls out of her mouth and her teeth are ugly and fang-like. Her ugliness is made especially obvious by its immediate juxtaposition to Caṇḍikā and her often cited beauty.[14] Kālī's body comes forth from Caṇḍikā's physical form, and while it is not necessarily the case that a beautiful form should come forth from a beautiful form, the contrast of Caṇḍikā's beauty and Kālī's hideousness serves to make Kālī's gruesome appearance more striking. Kālī's gruesomeness is also conveyed through the choice of such descriptive terms as *atibhairavā*, *bhīṣanā*, and *bhīmākṣīm*.[15] The term *bhairavā*, the feminine form of *bhairava*, indicates something frightful, terrible, horrible, and formidable; the prefix *ati* serves to intensify the meaning of *bhairavā*, so that Kālī is described not just as horrible but exceptionally horrible. Monier-Williams notes that *bhairavī*, another feminised form of the word, is the proper name of an aspect of Durgā; this suggests the notion that the *Devī Māhātmya* is constructing Kālī to be a particular aspect of Caṇḍikā, which is discussed more fully in Chapter Three. The term *bhīṣanā* also connotes the terrifying, the frightening, the formidable, and the horrible. The word serves to identify a form of Bhairavā, a feminine version of Śiva, as well as Śiva himself, and is the name of a *rākṣasa* and an epithet of the Vedic figure Nirṛti, who is associated with darkness and the night. The term *bhīmākṣīm*

[14] See, for example, the speech of Śumbha and Niśumbha's servants: DM 5.43-53.
[15] All definitions are from Monier-Williams' *Sanskṛit-English Dictionary*.

means “she of the terrible eyes,” with *bhīma* indicating something fearful, terrible, awful, formidable, and tremendous. It too, in its feminine form, functions as the name of a form of Durgā. These descriptors mutually reinforce the themes of the horrible or gruesome and the terrifying. The accumulation of these repulsive physical traits, highlighted by the repetition of the themes of the horrible and the terrifying present in the Sanskrit terminology, serves to strengthen the construction of Kālī as a grotesque and horrifying character. Mieke Bal notes that the accumulation of particular traits functions heavily in the construction of a character,[16] and the repulsive nature of all of Kālī’s accumulated physical characteristics indicates the importance of gruesomeness for Kālī’s character. The text’s repetition of repulsive themes with relation to Kālī indicates a textual concern that Kālī be understood by the reader to be a gruesome character. Furthermore, following the suggestions of Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, who point out that nearly the entirety of the fundamental nature of an important character in a saga is conveyed within that character’s first brief description,[17] Kālī’s initial description indicates that her gruesomeness is a foundational aspect of her character. While the *Devī Māhātmya* is not a saga and Kālī is not the main character in the text, the similarities between saga characters and the construction of Kālī’s character serve to suggest that interpreting Kālī’s initial description in this way provides valuable information. As the entirety of Kālī’s physical description is contained in her opening scene, this scene is the primary vehicle for the text to construct her nature for the reader; studying it closely has enhanced the understandings of Kālī’s nature as posited by the *Devī Māhātmya*. It is clear from this initial physical description that Kālī is a repulsive and gruesome creature.

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[16] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009), 126-127.
[17] Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 172.

Kālī's propensity for violence is also made clear by this physical description, indicating that it too forms an important part of Kālī's character in the *Devī Māhātmya*. This inclination, however, is not clearly evident in her initial physical description, but is instead conveyed through descriptors foreshadowing those later signifiers which construct Kālī as especially violent. In particular, her wide mouth, lolling tongue, and ugly teeth point towards her later battle techniques of devouring her enemies and drinking their blood, as well as to her hideous yells and shouts. Her mouth is the only specific aspect of her body to receive repeated references and, other than her eyes, is the only feature on her face to receive textual attention. The text's repetitions highlighting her mouth increase the attention drawn to it, strongly linking Kālī's textual identity to her mouth, so that the bulk of her character is reflected by or connected to it. While the elements of this feature are grotesque in their exaggeration – the wideness of the mouth, the terrible form of the teeth – they primarily serve to indicate Kālī's violent behaviour, which itself reinforces her gruesomeness. Her mouth also suggests hunger and insatiability, as do her sunken eyes and emaciated figure. Since part of Kālī's violence involves eating her enemies, the theme of hunger also reinforces Kālī's violent nature. These repeated mentions of her mouth also foreshadow her battle with Raktabīja and his replicas,[18] as she devours the regenerated Raktabījas and drinks the blood of the original Raktabīja so that Caṇḍikā may safely kill him. Her mouth's connections to gruesomeness and violence reinforce the primacy of these traits for Kālī's character.

The gruesomeness of Kālī's appearance is further emphasised by her garments and by the objects that she carries. Her garland of human heads signals her prowess as a warrior and her tiger skin evokes images of violence and death. Moreover, a garland of human

[18] DM 8.52-62.

heads is a particularly grisly adornment, both disgusting and terrifying; the underlying motif of death in her adornments is repeated in the skull atop her fighting staff. Kālī's weapons also explicitly denote her as a deadly warrior: she carries a sword, a spear, the previously mentioned staff, and a noose; her physical body, particularly her mouth and teeth, acts as a weapon as well. That she carries only weapons and wears only the remnants of dead creatures serves to highlight, as if it were not sufficiently clear, that Kālī exists only to fight and to kill.[19] It is rendered immediately apparent by her physical description that her identity is constructed primarily upon the basic concepts of violent battle and grisly death.

Kālī's character is also constructed through the presence of traits suggesting hunger and intoxication, although these traits are less fundamental to her character than are her physical gruesomeness and her propensity for violence. The sunken quality of Kālī's eyes contributes to their fearsomeness, and evokes images of hunger or malnourishment, which is further indicated by her emaciation, as well as her predilection for eating her enemies; these themes are also evoked by the repeated mentions of her mouth. The theme of hunger is also linked closely to Kālī's blood-drinking, which is linked to intoxication through the descriptions of other characters. The redness of Kālī's eyes suggests that she is intoxicated, although she is never explicitly described as such. Redness of eyes is explicitly associated with intoxication in the *Devī Māhātmya*; Caṇḍikā, for example, has reddened eyes when intoxicated with alcohol.[20] Kālī is thus implicitly posited as intoxicated on blood, as she frequently drinks the blood of her enemies, which is a substance that intoxicates the *mātṛ*s

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[19] See, for example, several of the *śaktī*s who, while also violent, carry less grisly objects: Brahmāṇī carries a rosary and waterpot while Vaiṣṇavī carries Viṣṇu's conch, DM 8.13-20.
[20] DM 3.33.

following the death of Raktabīja.[21] Other characters in the text are also intoxicated with or affected by alcohol, haughtiness, and anger: Caṇḍikā is intoxicated by a powerful beverage, Śumbha's "mind [is] deranged with anger," and Mahiṣāsura is "puffed up" or haughty "and drunk on might and power."[22] It remains unclear whether these affect Kālī in a similar way. While Kālī is associated with both haughtiness, particularly in her speech to Caṇḍikā, discussed in the following section, and with anger, discussed subsequently, it is not clear from the text that these intoxicate her in the manner they do other characters. Anger, for example, serves to define Kālī rather than affect her. She is also associated with alcohol in later devotional traditions, but this association is not made explicit in this narrative. Kālī's intoxication is thus most closely connected to blood-drinking, which is an integral part of her figure in later narratives and devotional traditions. The themes of anger and intoxication also suggest thematic links to *asura*s, which will be further discussed in Chapter Three. While these are crucial aspects to Kālī's character, an examination of her figure based solely on her explicit physical description in the *Devī Māhātmya* clearly indicates the primacy of her gruesome and repulsive nature rather than her blood-induced drunkenness. Although Kālī's repulsiveness is without equal in the *Devī Māhātmya*, it is not without precedent in the larger literary context.

The *Devī Māhātmya* exists as a text within the larger Sanskrit literary corpus, which has frequently been interpreted within the Indian traditions with recourse to various theories of aesthetics. These theories attempt to structure the various kinds of art and aesthetic responses, and to account for and explain such responses within the viewers, listeners, or readers. The theory of aesthetics known as *rasa* is particularly concerned with

[21] DM 8.62.
[22] DM 3.33-35, 8.2, and 3.34, respectively.

such responses. This theory has its textual basis in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, attributed to Bharata and composed at various points between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE. A. Sankaran concludes that the *śāstra* existed in its current form before the beginning of the seventh century CE, and perhaps before the fifth century CE as well; this last date is based upon a possible mention of the text in the work of Kālidāsa.[23] While the text deals with a variety of subjects and theories concerning the dramatic arts, and in particular theatre, it is Bharata's discussion of *rasa* that is especially relevant to this thesis, as this discussion explains the specific means by which a drama induces responses in its audience. The term *rasa* is translated as "taste" or "flavour," and the theory discusses the emotions, or *bhāva*s, conveyed by actors to the audience through particular actions and gestures, or *anubhāva*s, thereby creating in the audience a certain 'flavour' of experience.[24] The theory of *rasa* describes and classifies these experiences; as David L. Gitomer states, *rasa* theory "is not only an aesthetic theory but also a psychology of aesthetic experience."[25] Rather than merely detailing what in the artistic object is meant to produce emotion, the theory also discusses those emotions in the experience of the audience. The eight *rasa*s are, briefly, *śṛṅgāra*, the erotic; *hāsya*, the humorous; *raudra*, terror or the furious; *karuṇa*, compassion; *vīra*, the heroic; *adbhuta*, the wondrous; *bībhatsa*, the disgusting; and *bhayānaka*, the dreadful. While Bharata's text deals primarily with drama, the theory is applicable to all forms of artistic expression and reception; as Surendra Nath Dasgupta notes, *rasa* is always

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[23] A. Sankaran, *Some Aspects of Literary Criticism in Sanskrit: or, The Theories of Rasa and Dhvani* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1973[1926]), 14.

[24] The relationships among *bhāva*s, *anubhāva*s, and *rasa* is more complex than this simple description, which is nevertheless adequate for the purposes of this thesis. For a more thorough discussion of these relationships, see Adya Rangacharya, *Introduction to Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998[1966]), 75-81.

[25] David L. Gitomer, "Wrestling with *raudra* in Sanskrit poetics: Gender, pollution, and *śāstra*," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 4, no. 3 (2000): 220.

a product of artistic situations and aesthetics, whether in art, theatre, or literature.[26] G.B. Mohan Thampi claims that *rasa* is that particular experience a person has when she “read[s] a poem or witness[es] a play.” Indeed, Mohan Thampi argues that “Indian aesthetic theory is primarily audience- or reader-oriented and the center of much discussion is the response of the readers.”[27] He specifically discusses *rasa* in the context of the reader, with reference to traditional Indian aesthetic theory, indicating that the discussion of *rasa* with reference to literature and the experience of the reader is a part of Indian literary tradition. While literary theory in India seems to have begun by centring on drama, it nevertheless encompasses poetic arts more generally.[28] The expression of *bhāva*s by the actors in a play is thus comparable to the expressions of characters in a text. While in a play the actors can use certain physical gestures, sounds, and costuming to express particular concepts, a text relies on its characters’ actions and descriptions to convey meaning. The characters of the *Devī Māhātmya* thus create certain *rasa*s in its readers, and the study of how a character accomplishes this is of particular importance in a character study.

Kālī’s physical descriptions and actions can also be considered as the expressions of particular *bhāva*s, producing certain *rasa*s in the text’s audience and readers. Moreover, the use of *rasa* theory in this study can point toward the presence of certain literary themes or tropes in Sanskrit literature in the *Devī Māhātmya*. The two *rasa*s that most immediately lend themselves to a discussion of Kālī’s portrayal in this text are *bībhatsa* and *bhayānaka*. The first, *bībhatsa*, is “stimulated by seeing or hearing whatever is undesirable, ugly, [and] evil;” it is “produced by things which disturb the mind like seeing something unpleasant or

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[26] Surendra Nath Dasgupta, “The Theory of Rasa,” in *An Introduction to Indian Poetics*, ed. V. Raghavan (S.I., 1970), 37.
[27] G.B. Mohan Thampi, “‘Rasa’ as Aesthetic Experience,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 24, no. 1 (1965): 75.
[28] Franklin Edgerton, “Indirect Suggestion in Poetry: A Hindu Theory of Literary Æsthetics,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 76, no. 5 (1936): 668.

by [the] wrong smell, touch, taste and sound."[29] It is associated with the colour blue and the deity Mahākāla.[30] It is one of the 'source' *rasa*s, from which a secondary *rasa* is derived; from *bībhatsa* is derived the *rasa* of *bhayānaka*, or dread. The *rasa* of *bhayānaka* is associated with dark colours and with the deity Kāla. This *rasa*, which can also be translated as fear, arises from "anything disgusting or repulsive." [31] It is stimulated by hearing or seeing odd or strange sounds or figures, or from encountering eerie situations.[32] Kālī, of course, is an ugly, frightening figure whose violence is extreme and who makes strange sounds, including an eerie laugh. Thus Kālī's own repulsive traits are echoes or parallels to these larger themes of grotesquery, the details of which serve to enhance Kālī's character and the response of the readers to that character. In other textual traditions, as will be discussed more fully in a later section of this chapter, Kālī continues to be described in ways that evoke revulsion, fear, and a sense of eeriness. Kālī's character is constructed to indicate and evoke these *rasa*s, as the themes of the disgusting and the dreadful are thus employed by the text to create a particular kind of repulsive and fear-evoking character.

Kālī is not the only character in the *Devī Māhātmya* who is constructed as repulsive: Śivadūtī, Caṇḍikā's *śakti*, is described as "very frightening" and "gruesome."[33] However, Śivadūtī, who is a much less central character than Kālī, is simply not as gruesome as Kālī. Śivadūtī's gruesomeness provides a parallel and a comparison for that of Kālī; while Kālī's gruesome description could have been brief, as is Śivadūtī's, the repeated and accumulated gruesome qualities connected to Kālī indicate that Kālī is the more fearsome and repulsive

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[29] Bharata, *The Nāṭyaśāstra: English Translation with Critical Notes*, translated by Adya Rangacharya, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1996, 61.
[30] Ibid., 56.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 60-61.
[33] DM 8.22.

character. The details of the *rasa*s of *bībhatsa* and *bhayānaka* enhance Kālī's position in the *Devī Māhātmya* as the primary repulsive and fear-evoking element.

Kālī's evocation of *rasa* is not limited to *bībhatsa* and *bhayānaka*; her specific descriptions and actions also explicitly express the *bhāva* of *krodha*, or anger, which evokes the *rasa* of *raudra*. This *rasa* is the experience of terror or fury, provoked by the terrifyingly angry *bhāva* expressed by a character. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharata notes that *raudra* is associated with the colour red and the deity Rudra.[34] This *rasa* is connected to *rākṣasa*s and "persons of violent nature," because it is in the nature of these figures that anger is thought to be present. Bharata describes *rākṣasa*s and other "evil spirits" as being "bristling and unkempt," with "tawny hair," "red, ill-matched eyes," "of dark and dreadful appearance," and as having "more than one face."[35] The *rasa* of raudra is often caused by fights or violence, and is involved in actions including "beating, hitting, inflicting pain, cutting, striking, attacking with weapons, shedding blood, [and] dragging." It is acted by "red eyes, knitting eye-brows, gnashing teeth, biting lips, puffing up cheeks, [and] rubbing the palms."[36] These are traits commonly associated with *rākṣasa*s as well, and the connections among *rākṣasa*s, anger, and violence occur throughout Hindu mythology. The parallels between Kālī's characteristics and those of *rākṣasa*s within the context of *rasa* are important for Kālī's character, and the similarities between Kālī and *rākṣasa*s will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three. Violence is a particularly important dimension of both *rākṣasa*s and anger, with violent acts a clear indication of either. The act of decapitating others, mentioned by Bharata, and the presence of multiple weapons are

[34] Bharata, *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, 56.
[35] Ibid., 59-60. Given the prevalence of figures in Indian mythology with multiple heads, this reference to multiple faces should probably be interpreted literally, although it may also serve to imply deception.
[36] Ibid., 59.

also methods for the actor to indicate the *bhāva* of *krodha*.[37] In Kālī's first scene, she springs out of Caṇḍikā forehead armed with multiple weapons, and she quickly decapitates two powerful *asura* generals. The *rasa* of *raudra* is connected quite closely with the *rasa*s of *bībhatsa* and *bhayānaka*, as many of the violent actions associated with anger give rise to fear and disgust in those who witness them.[38] While it is clear that through Kālī's expression of *krodha* her character is strongly linked to rage, this connection is also clear from the text itself.

The *Devī Māhātmya* explicitly connects Kālī and anger four times, which signifies the importance of anger to her character. The textual connections between anger and Kālī are thus clearly important to Kālī's depiction in the text, and this importance is strengthened by their repetition. Moreover, the *purāṇ*ic style of discourse is predominantly both direct and brief. Each term and reference thus carries significant associations to related concepts. The four explicit references to Kālī's anger all occur in the seventh book, which contains Kālī's initial description. This indicates the importance of this trait for Kālī's character: Kālī's first description is integral to her characterisation, as was previously discussed with reference to saga characters.[39] In this book, Kālī comes forth from Caṇḍikā's 'angry' face; Kālī "angrily cackled;" and Muṇḍa is "wrathfully smitten with her sword."[40] In the fourth explicit reference to Kālī's anger, the term *ruṣā* is used in connection with Kālī's actions in battle; Vasudeva Agrawala translates the term as 'fury,' while Coburn does not include a reference to wrath in his translation.[41] The repetition of the

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Priyadarshi Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics: An Application of Rasa Theory to Modern Western Literature* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1997), 146.
[39] See above discussion of Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg with reference to saga characters.
[40] DM 7.4-5, Sanskrit: *kopena*; DM 7.18, Sanskrit: *jahāsātiruṣā*; and DM 7.20, Sanskrit: *sā khaḍgābhīhataṃ ruṣā*, respectively.
[41] DM 7.12.

term *ruṣā* serves to indicate its importance to Kālī's character, as discussed by Bal.[42] Kālī's anger is thus a crucial aspect of her character in the text.

In the first reference to anger, Kālī is explicitly linked to Caṇḍikā and Caṇḍikā's wrathfulness by her emergence from Caṇḍikā's angry face, although it is unclear whether Kālī is born from this anger or is summoned by it. The reason for which Caṇḍikā becomes so angered at this point in the narrative is not made explicit, although it is clear that she becomes angry immediately upon seeing Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, who were the original servants who saw Caṇḍikā and reported it to Śumbha and Niśumbha. It is possible that Caṇḍikā's anger is a response to this event rather than to the simple fact that they have come to abduct her, since she did not grow angry upon seeing Dhūmralocana, who came with the same intent; Chapter Three will return to this idea of anger as a response to injustice. The lack of explicit reasoning in the text presents Caṇḍikā's rage-blackened face as out of the ordinary, which perhaps it is, given that Kālī suddenly springs forth from it. The text does not claim either that Kālī existed before her emergence from Caṇḍikā's forehead, so that Caṇḍikā would perhaps be a mediator of Kālī's energy into flesh, or that Kālī is born from Caṇḍikā's body. Kālī's origins remain unclear in this text, although the motif of one being coming forth from another, common in this text, may serve to provide some clarity to this issue.[43]

Caṇḍikā is posited to have an existence prior to her formation through the *tejas* of the *deva*s in the second episode, as in the first episode she was already dwelling within the form of Viṣṇu with no creation or mediation required for that existence. In the second

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[42] See Methodology section in Chapter One.

[43] For example, Caṇḍikā comes forth from Viṣṇu's body (DM 1.68-69) and from the sheath of Pārvatī's body (DM 5.38-39); Mahiṣāsura comes forth from his own body, giving himself multiple lives (DM 3.28-32); Kālī comes forth from Caṇḍikā's forehead (DM 7.5); the *śakti*s come forth from the bodies of various *deva*s (DM 8.11-20) and from Caṇḍikā (DM 8.22); and Niśumbha comes forth from his own corpse to continue battling Caṇḍikā (DM 9.32-33).

episode, in which she battles Mahiṣāsura, the *deva*s combine their *tejas* and form the *mahādevī*, giving her body parts and weapons.[44] As Thomas Coburn argues, this does not mean that Caṇḍikā is entirely indebted to them for her existence; she is subsequently understood in the text as an eternal and independent presence. Furthermore, he notes that it is clear from the first episode, in which Caṇḍikā's withdrawal from Viṣṇu's body allows him to fight Madhu and Kaiṭabha,[45] that Caṇḍikā is held to be "the primary ontological reality."[46] Caṇḍikā is not a creation of the *deva*s, and she is not born from them. She instead emerges through them; the text uses the Sanskrit terms *niścakrāma* and *nirgatam* to express this sense of emergence.[47] The *śakti*s in the text are also understood to have an existence prior to their entrance in the eighth book, as they are described as "having sprung forth from the bodies of Brahmā, Śiva, Skanda, / Viṣṇu, and Indra."[48] By the language used for their entrance, *viniṣkramya*, the text implies that these *śakti*s exist in some fashion within the *deva*s and simply emerge, or 'spring forth' on occasion; the textual similarity to the language used for Caṇḍikā's emergence from the *deva*s supports this interpretation. As Kinsley argues, *śakti*s are not ultimately meant to be understood as the consorts or personified powers of the *deva*s, but rather as extensions of the *mahādevī*.[49] The identification of seven of the *śakti*s as the *mātṛ*s also supports this view, since in the larger literary context *mātṛ*s are not associated with *deva*s.

Kālī's emergence from Caṇḍikā is more ambiguous, since she is not Caṇḍikā's *śakti*; that *śakti* emerges later as Śivadūtī. Thus Kālī's entrance cannot immediately be

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[44] DM 2.9-30.
[45] DM 1.68-69.
[46] Thomas B. Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, eds. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 35-36.
[47] DM 2.9 and 2.10, respectively.
[48] DM 8.12.
[49] David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997[1986]), 156-158.

understood to be identical to that of the *śakti*s. The Sanskrit term describing Kālī's emergence from Caṇḍikā is the word *viniṣkrāntā*, which bears a textual similarity to the language used to describe the entrances both of Caṇḍikā and of the *śakti*s. Based upon both the Sanskrit and the examples of the other *devī*s, it is likely that the *Devī Māhātmya* imagines Kālī to come forth from Caṇḍikā rather than to be created by her. However, if it is the case that Kālī emerges from Caṇḍikā, as Caṇḍikā emerges from the *deva*s, and has an implied prior existence to this emergence, it remains unclear what sort of creation or origin myth the *Devī Māhātmya* imagines Kālī to have. Kālī's name suggests darkness of colour, and as she emerged from Caṇḍikā's rage-filled and thus blackened face[50] it may be that the text is positing Kālī's creation to be from rage itself, with her characteristic dark skin a continual reminder of her origin. This is supported by other myths in Kālī's literary context in which she emerges from a dark and angry face, as is discussed subsequently. This entrance strongly connects Kālī to anger and wrath, which in turn reinforces the theme of Kālī's violence, as in this text it is clear that anger precedes extraordinarily violent behaviour in battle.

The connection between anger and violence in the third explicit reference to Kālī's anger, in which Kālī slays Muṇḍa 'wrathfully,' again reinforces her violent nature, as does the fourth reference in which the term *ruṣā*, or fury, is used in context with her behaviour in battle. Many of the *asura* generals also display anger before engaging in vicious battle, particularly during the second episode, in which Caṇḍikā battles Mahiṣāsura.[51] Mahiṣāsura also displays anger immediately preceding violent acts, and Caṇḍikā gets "angry in order to

[50] DM 7.4, Sanskrit: *masīvarṇam*.
[51] See, for example, DM 3.1-9 and 3.12; see also the third episode, DM 9.5 and on, for the example of Śumbha and Niśumbha.

slay him."[52] Kālī's anger is thus intimately connected to her violence. Her angry laughter is discussed in the following section, and her speech and the sounds she produces also serve to highlight the foundational traits of anger, gruesomeness, and violence. These four explicit references to rage in connection with Kālī thus serve to associate her with anger, and to link anger to her violent behaviour. The concept of anger preceding extreme violence resonates throughout Sanskrit mythological literature, as is discussed subsequently with reference to the *Sauptikaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*.

There is implicit evidence for the assertion that anger forms a fundamental part of Kālī's character, and this support is found in an interpretation based in *rasa* theory. Her connection to anger is also evident in the details of her relationships to other characters, as discussed in Chapter Three, since she shares a number of textual similarities with characters who express anger in conjunction with these shared traits. Kālī's implied connections to anger are more numerous but are also more subtle than are the explicit references previously mentioned. Her links to anger become more apparent by the application of *rasa* theory to her actions and descriptions. Kālī's sunken, reddened eyes suggest wrathfulness, since eyes reddened with anger are frequently referenced in this text.[53] There is also a textual link in the *Devī Māhātmya* between anger and the mouth, a pivotal feature of Kālī's, as in the ninth book the *asura*s are "[a]ngry and biting their lips."[54] While there is no mention of Kālī biting her lips, the subtle link between the mouth and anger reinforces the importance of anger for Kālī's character, because of the importance the mouth holds for the construction of Kālī's character, as discussed

[52] DM 3.27; see 2.35 on for examples of Mahiṣāsura's anger. The term *kopaṃ* is used to described Caṇḍikā, while the term *krodha* is used in connection with Mahiṣāsura.
[53] Mahiṣāsura, for example, has "eyes red with anger" while fighting Caṇḍikā, DM 3.7.
[54] DM 9.5.

previously. In *rasa* theory, *krodha* is expressed through the reddened eyes, teeth-gnashing, and lip-biting of the actor, as well as through the actor's "terrible deeds" and "weapon-wielding."[55] It is clear that Kālī exhibits these textual cues, and it is apparent that Kālī is constructed by the text as a figure who expresses anger. Although the text does not seek to convey information about Kālī's emotional state, motivations, or 'inner life,' a situation which often relegates a character to a 'flat' status in literary analysis, by interpreting the text through the lens of *rasa* theory it becomes apparent that Kālī is herself extremely angry, and that this anger is exceedingly important to the portrayal of her character. While the *rasa*s of *bībhatsa* and *bhayānaka* are evoked by Kālī's portrayal but are not always expressed directly by her, Kālī is actually expressing *krodha* through her actions and gestures, thus giving rise to the *rasa* of *raudra*, or terror, in those who witness – or read of – her. Kālī's character expresses this familiar theme in Sanskrit poetics through the accumulation and repetition of common attributes and textual cues present in Sanskrit literature more generally. This supports the claim that Kālī's anger is pivotal to her portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Gitomer also supports this position, and discusses Kālī, as well as other fierce *devī*s present in the cultural imagination at the time of the *Devī Māhātmya*'s composition, in the context of both *raudra* and *vīra*, the *rasa* of the heroic.[56] His arguments are discussed more fully in the Conclusion.

The connections between Kālī and anger would not have been as apparent without examining the connections between Kālī's character and *rasa* theory, and reading more closely into *raudra* and *krodha*, or anger, may also provide some further information about the construction of Kālī's character. In *rasa* theory, the *bhāva* of *krodha* is often a response

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[55] Bharata, *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, 59-60.
[56] Gitomer, "Wrestling with *raudra*."

to harsh words or injustice, both of which occurred prior to Kālī's entrance, when the *asura*s threatened Caṇḍikā with abduction.[57] This suggests that Kālī's character, particularly as she emerges from Caṇḍikā's angry face, is a textual response to harshness and oppression, namely the *asura*s' attitudes to Caṇḍikā, whom they fail to recognise as the supreme deity. This failure of recognition may also contribute to Caṇḍikā's anger and thus to Kālī's entrance, although this is not explicitly supported by the text. Furthermore, Kālī's connections to anger are also evident through several of her behaviours, the majority of which are both gruesome and violent. As Priyadarshi Patnaik states, violence is "the very basic manifestation of anger."[58] There are, as previously discussed, several moments in this text where characters express anger and subsequently commit extremely violent acts. Kālī's displays of anger and her extraordinary capacity for violence are thus inextricably connected.

Kālī's Behaviour in the *Devī Māhātmya*: Violent Sacrifice & the Importance of Noise

Kālī's extreme violence is an important and fundamental aspect of her character, and builds upon those features of gruesomeness and rage constructed through her physical description. Her violent behaviour, particularly in her interactions with Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa, and Raktabīja, serves to augment and to reinforce these traits, as do the loud and troubling sounds she produces during battle. The manner of Raktabīja's defeat serves to reinforce Kālī's gruesomeness, and it is her battle with Raktabīja that most strongly indicates the necessity of Kālī's presence for victory in battle. The battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, constituting Kālī's opening scene in the text, is also quite violent. Extraordinary and grisly violence, particularly violence predicated by rage, is a common theme in the larger Sanskrit

[57] DM 6.16-7.3.
[58] Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, 144.

literary context, since many of the *purāṇa*s, the *Mahābhārata*, and even the early Vedic hymns are often violent both in directly narrated actions and in thematic content. One especially clear example of such violence is the particularly gory passage of the *Sauptikaparvan* in the *Mahābhārata*. This text is often read, in part, as a metaphor for the sacrificial nature of battle, a theme also present in Kālī's battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and suggested more explicitly by her speech to Caṇḍikā. Examining this larger literary context, with particular recourse to the *Sauptikaparvan* and the sacrificial themes therein, provides some insight into the themes present in the construction of Kālī's character. This section thus begins with a detailed account of Kālī's violent behaviour in battle and of the various sounds she produces, including her speech-act. These behaviours are then analysed with respect to their importance for Kālī's character in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as well as within the larger literary context of extreme and gory violence.

Almost the entirety of Kālī's activity in battle is described in her two major scenes: her opening battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and her defeat of Raktabīja. In the former, the battle scene is composed of verses 8 through 21 of the seventh book, which is only 25 verses long in total. In verses 7.8, 7.9, and 7.10 Kālī eats the *asura* soldiers:

> She fell upon the great Asuras in that army, slaying them immediately.
> She then devoured the forces of the enemies of the gods.
> Attacking both the front and rear guard, having seized the elephants
> Together with their riders and bells, she hurled them into her mouth with a single hand.
> Likewise having flung the cavalry with its horses and the chariots with their charioteers
> Into her mouth, she brutally pulverized them with her teeth.[59]

[59] DM 7.8-10, Sanskrit: *sā vegenābhipatitā ghātayantī mahāsurān / sainye tatra surārīṇāmabhakṣayat tadbalam // pārṣṇigrāṅkuśa grāhiyodhaghaṇṭāsamanvitān / samādāyaikahastena mukhe cikṣena vāraṇān // tathaiva yodham turagai rathaṃ sārathinā saha / nikṣipya vaktre daśanaiścarvayantyatibhairavam.*

These verses also denote her swiftness in battle and her ability to destroy multiple enemies at one time.[60] Her voracious appetite for enemy soldiers and their mounts is evident by her treatment of the elephants and cavalry, and in each of these three verses she uses only her mouth and teeth to kill her enemies, rather than any of her weapons. She also eats the *asura*s' weapons and missiles, "crunch[ing] them to bits with her teeth."[61] In the eleventh verse she again uses her physical body as a weapon, when:

> She seized one [*asura*] by the hair, and another by the throat.
> Having attacked one with her foot, she crushed another against her breast.[62]

The totality of her destructive behaviour is particularly clear in verse 7.13:

> The army of all those mighty and distinguished demons
> She destroyed: she devoured some, and thrashed the others.[63]

Strikingly, this is all accomplished – and without a single *asura* even attempting to attack her – before she is described as using a weapon. It is not until the fourteenth verse that her weapons are even mentioned: "Some [*asura*s] were sliced by her sword, others pounded with her skull-topped staff."[64] Her ability to kill significant numbers of *asura*s with her body rather than with weapons highlights her powerful strength, her viciousness, and her superiority in battle. The only other mentions of her weapons in this passage occur when she decapitates Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, slicing off both of their heads with her sword.[65] Her battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa is swift and deadly. When Caṇḍa sees that Kālī has slain the

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[60] DM 7.8-9.
[61] DM 7.12, Sanskrit: *daśanair mathi tānyapi*.
[62] DM 7.11, Sanskrit: *ekaṃ jagrāha keśeṣu grīvāyāmatha cāparam / pādenākramya caivānyamurasānyamapothayat*.
[63] DM 7.13, Sanskrit: *balināṃ tad balaṃ sarvamasurāṇāṃ durātmanām / mamardābhakṣayaccānyānanyāṃścātāḍayattatha*.
[64] DM 7.14, Sanskrit: *asinā nihatāḥ kecitkecitkhaṭvāṅgatāhitāḥ*.
[65] DM 7.19-20

entirety of his army,[66] he dashes to her and shoots many arrows at her.[67] Muṇḍa then hurls thousands of discuses; all of these arrows and discuses simply enter Kālī's mouth rather than striking her body. The text compares the stream of discuses entering her mouth to "a multitude of suns entering into the middle of a black cloud."[68] Kālī laughs angrily at these attacks, mounts Caṇḍikā's lion, and rides over to Caṇḍa. Then, "having seized him by the hair, she cut off his head with her sword."[69] She then kills Muṇḍa, also with her sword, and the battle is over.[70]

Between this first battle and the following one in which she defeats Raktabīja, Kālī's battle actions are described only once:

> Then right in front of him (Śiva?) Kālī roamed about, ripping open some with strokes of her spear,
> And crushing others with her skull-topped staff.[71]

Following her battle with Raktabīja she is mentioned twice, both times briefly, and always in connection with Śivadūtī, Caṇḍikā's *śakti*, and with Caṇḍikā's lion mount. In both of these verses she is described as devouring the enemy soldiers.[72] The image of devouring one's enemies rather than simply killing them suggests a more complete destruction of those enemies, as there are not even corpses left after the act of eating. Furthermore, the act of eating another character, particularly in such a violent fashion, indicates an imbalance of power; generally it is the strong who kill and eat the weak. By eating her enemies Kālī is portrayed as more than gruesome, violent, and immensely strong; the text deliberately

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[66] While the text explicitly says that Kālī has slain the entirety of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa's army (DM 7.15), a later verse notes that after the deaths of the generals, the remainder of the army flees in fear (DM 7.21). The text does not reconcile this situation.
[67] DM 7.15-16.
[68] DM 7.17, Sanskrit: *babhuryathārkabimbāni subahūni ghanodarum*.
[69] DM 7.19, Sanskrit: *gūhītvā cāya keśeṣu śirastenāsinācchinat*.
[70] DM 7.20; later verses make it clear that Muṇḍa is also decapitated.
[71] DM 8.31, Sanskrit: *tasyāgratastathā kālī śūlapātavidāritān / khaṭvāṅgapothitāṃścārīn kurvatī vyacarattadā*. Parentheses are original to Coburn's translation.
[72] DM 9.35 and 9.39.

portrays her as acting in ways that indicate her self-identified superiority over the *asura*s. This may suggest haughtiness, a theme discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter, but more clearly indicates the inferiority of the *asura*s vis-à-vis Kālī: she reduces them to mere food. The act of eating one's enemies is also consistent with Kālī's predilection for the complete devastation of her enemies; she is rarely content simply to kill the *asura*s and instead destroys them with utter abandon and brutality.

Kālī's battle with Raktabīja is her most important moment in the text, as she plays a critical role in his defeat. He is a formidable enemy, as he manages to strike each of the seven *mātṛ*s with his club. While it is rare in this text that an *asura* ever manages to assault a *devī*, Raktabīja even strikes Caṇḍikā herself, which reinforces his prowess in battle. He does not strike either Kālī or Śivadūtī, even when Kālī drinks his blood. His regenerative powers make it impossible for the *śakti*s to attack him successfully, and as his copies pervade the world the *deva*s grow terrified. Caṇḍikā laughs at the *deva*s' fear and instructs Kālī to consume Raktabīja's blood, spilt by Caṇḍikā's weapons, as well as the replica-Raktabījas born from that blood.[73] Caṇḍikā then attacks Raktabīja with her spear, and "[w]ith her mouth Kālī seized upon the blood of Raktabīja."[74] Raktabīja still attempts to fight Caṇḍikā, but blood loss renders him weak and his blows do not hurt her. Kālī drinks all of his blood, and consumes all of his replicas. During this attack Caṇḍikā continues to assault him with multiple weapons, and eventually he falls, bloodless and mortally wounded, to the ground.[75]

This passage suggests a number of aspects about Kālī's character which supplement and reinforce those traits already made visible by her physical appearance. First, her terrible

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[73] DM 8.51-53.
[74] DM 8.56, Sanskrit: *mukhena jaguhe kālī raktabījasya śoṇitam*.
[75] DM 8.55-61.

ferocity is made more explicit and more visceral. While her general activity on the battlefield is extraordinarily destructive, the violent intimacy expressed by her drinking of Raktabīja's blood allows the reader to achieve an even closer glimpse at the extent of Kālī's ferocity. This effect is attained primarily through the focus of the passage, which highlights one character rather than several. When Kālī slaughters many thousands of enemies at once, the effect of her violence upon an individual *asura* is lost. While her brutality is still conveyed by the destruction of many *asura*s, the specific details of Raktabīja's death create a more powerful image of Kālī's violence. This is also true of her battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, although the detailed description of her encounter with Raktabīja achieves an intimacy unmatched by any of her other actions in the text. This again reinforces her ferocity and viciousness. Second, this passage emphasises Kālī's willingness to be gruesome in battle, a recurring theme in her characterisation. While this passage suggests that Kālī was willing to drink Raktabīja's blood because Caṇḍikā asked her to do so, in context with Kālī's other behaviour in battle, which typically and characteristically includes eating her enemies, it becomes clear that the text implies that Kālī wants to consume her enemies. She is certainly capable of killing them in other ways, as is demonstrated most clearly in the seventh book, and yet she repeatedly chooses to devour the *asura*s. Consuming her enemies, whether bodily or by drinking their blood, is thus an integral part of Kālī's character. It is not then the case that Kālī took on the responsibility of doing what was necessary to kill Raktabīja. Instead, the text had, by this point, already constructed her as a character who would willingly, perhaps gleefully, consume the replicas and drink Raktabīja's blood. This leads to a third point concerning Kālī's position in the text, which is that she is viewed as indispensable in battle. Without Kālī's willingness to drink Raktabīja's blood and devour the cloned *asura*s, it appears that Raktabīja might have been

able to conquer the *devī*s. It is, however, necessarily the case that Raktabīja could never have defeated Caṇḍikā; the status of the *mahādevī* in the text is such that her defeat is theologically impossible. Thus the situation was not truly suspenseful, as the characters themselves, along with the general structure of Indian myths in which the *asura*s are always defeated, indicate that Raktabīja would have been overpowered even if Kālī were not a character in this text. The placement of Kālī in this scene thus indicates certain narrative choices on the part of the text: Kālī is a character posited as crucial to the success of the *devī*s over the *asura*s, and the *mahādevī* recognises her as such. Gitomer notes that the worship of Durgā, a prominent epithet of the *mahādevī,* is often considered to be necessary for success in battle;[76] as is discussed subsequently, in later *purāṇa*s Kālī is also intimately linked with success in battle, indicating a close relationship between Kālī and the *mahādevī,* and between Kālī and victory. This former relationship is discussed more fully in the following chapter.

Kālī's mouth, prominent in her battles with the *asura*s, is also used to make terrible sounds, including loud roars, laughter, and one important speech-act. During her first battle, in which she slaughters Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa, and their army, she "filled the directions with roars"[77] and "[a]ngrily cackled with terrible sounds."[78] Throughout the remainder of the third episode, there are two occasions on which Kālī makes a vast amount of speechless noise. Both occasions follow a description of the noise-making of Caṇḍikā and her lion. In the eighth book, seeing Śumbha approach with his army, Caṇḍikā "[f]illed the space between earth and sky with the twanging of her bowstring," her lion "let loose a monstrous

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[76] Gitomer, "Wrestling with *raudra*," 226. See also Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 107-111.
[77] DM 7.7, Sanskrit: *nādāpūritadiṅmukhā*.
[78] DM 7.18, Sanskrit: *jahāsātiruṣābhīmaṃ bhairavanādinī*.

roar," and Caṇḍikā added to this noise "with the sound of her bell."[79] In the ninth book, again following the approach of Śumbha, Caṇḍikā again rings her bells and twangs her bowstring, and adds the sound of her conch to the din; her lion also roars.[80] Following each occasion, Kālī is described as making even more noise than was already present. In the eighth book,

> Kālī, her mouth agape and filling the directions with snarls,
> Drowned out even the noise of the bowstring, lion, and bell with her gruesome sounds.[81]

In the ninth book,

> Kālī, too, springing up into the sky, pounded the earth
> With her hands, and all the previous sounds were drowned out by the din.[82]

The non-speech noises made by Kālī can be divided into three subgroups: roars or howls, laughter, and sounds made by the use of her body. Her roars and howls bring further attention to her mouth, her most prominent feature, and also implicitly link her to Caṇḍikā's lion, who is the only other character fighting against the *asura*s to make roaring sounds. Kālī's laughter, particularly during battle, reinforces her ferocious nature, and suggests that she finds humour in war, destruction, and death, which adds to her gruesomeness. Her cackles are 'angry,' which reinforce her repeated connections to wrath and rage. This laughter may also contribute to her disruptive and disturbing presence in the text: as Patnaik argues, laughter, as discussed in *rasa* theory, is a response to "things that do not fit."[83] Kālī is thus posited as a figure who does not quite fit within the cosmology used by the *Devī Māhātmya*, a position that speaks to her strange place within the character

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[79] DM 8.7-8.
[80] DM 9.17 and 9.19, respectively.
[81] DM 8.9, Sanskrit: *dhanurjyāsiṃhaghaṇṭānām nādāpuritadiṅmukhā / ninādairbhīṃṣaṇaih kālī jigye vistāritānanā*.
[82] DM 9.20, Sanskrit: *tataḥ kālī samutyatya gaganaṃ kṣmāmatāḍyat / karābhyāṃ tanninādena prāksvanāste terohitāḥ*.
[83] Patnaik, *Rasa in Aesthetics*, 100.

groups constructed by the text. This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three. Moreover, Patnaik states that “in laughter the element of cruelty can never be ruled out completely; and so also the possibility of the grotesque.”[84] Furthermore, Kālī’s laughter thus highlights both her grotesquery, previously discussed, and her cruelty. This cruelty, while perhaps implied in the *Devī Māhātmya* by Kālī’s brutal violence, becomes a more pivotal aspect of her figure in later traditions, particularly in those devotional movements which seek to love Kālī even as she is chastised for her uncaring ways. Kālī’s howls and laughter thus enhance and foreshadow particularly important parts of Kālī’s character, as do her other noisy actions.

Kālī uses parts of her body other than her mouth to make noise, as she pounds the earth with her hands to create a fearsome din. This use of mouth and body to create noise parallels her use of both as weapons in the seventh book, in which she slaughters *asura*s by means of her feet, breasts, mouth, and teeth, as well as with her numerous weapons. This parallel suggests that the noise she makes is perhaps linked thematically to her weapons, and is possibly a weapon itself. Certainly it is disruptive, and suggests at the very least a potential for chaotic and disordered behaviour. In the *Devī Māhātmya* loud noises that fill the triple world usually indicate chaos or disruption, as well as war. For example, Caṇḍikā frequently fills the worlds with terrible noises during the fighting,[85] and *asura*s often roar in battle.[86] These noises often shake the earth and the oceans.[87] Loud, non-harmonious noise is thus implicitly linked to chaos, anger, and destruction. This idea has echoes throughout the larger Hindu context, as sound has been ritually and philosophically important since the

[84] Ibid., 101.
[85] See, for example, DM 2.31-33 and 8.7.
[86] See, for example, DM 9.24.
[87] See, for example, DM 2.33.

early Vedic period, with certain sounds, in particular the syllable ‘oṁ,’ connected with the harmonious structure of the cosmos. Themes of order disrupted by chaos are prominent in Hindu mythology, and are also present in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Order is conceived of as the *deva*s in their rightful heavenly offices, while chaos occurs when the *deva*s no longer sit in these positions of authority; certain sounds are identified with each state of affairs. Loud and chaotic noises are intimately linked with battle and opposed to peacefulness: once the final battle with Śumbha and Niśumbha has been won, the world returns to order and peace as “the sounds that had been produced throughout the quarters [i.e. during battle] died away.”[88] The production of noise by a character can be seen as an indication of that character’s potential for chaos or destruction through the disruption of order; those capable of making the worlds tremble by their sounds alone are evidently capable of much greater destruction. These larger themes of noise and chaos indicate Kālī’s tremendous potential for destruction and violence, and suggest that Kālī is capable of chaos on a grand, nearly cosmic scale. This last claim is made evident by the text in an unusual way. On both occasions where Kālī makes an incredible amount of noise during battle her sounds are louder than those of both Caṇḍikā and her lion combined; when the text claims that Kālī’s noise drowned out all previous sounds, those sounds necessarily include the noise made by Caṇḍikā and the lion. Since wordless noise suggests disruptiveness, destructiveness and chaos, the text suggests that Kālī is *more* disruptive than Caṇḍikā herself, or at least that she has the potential to be so. However, since it is necessitated by the theological claim that Caṇḍikā contains all aspects of reality within herself, including that of chaos, Kālī cannot truly be understood as more disruptive than Caṇḍikā. Instead, the text implies that Kālī expresses Caṇḍikā’s own potential for disruption.

[88] DM 10.28.

Along with producing her wordless noise, Kālī also speaks, and is one of the only *devī*s in the text to do so. She speaks only briefly:

> Picking up the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, Kālī
> Approached Caṇḍikā and spoke words mixed with loud and cruel laughter:
> 'Here, as a present from me to you, are Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, two beasts
> Slain in the sacrifice of battle. Now you yourself can slay Śumbha and
> Niśumbha!'[89]

This speech-act is remarkable for a number of reasons, which can be roughly subdivided into two categories: those reasons concerning Kālī's characterisation or identity and those reasons concerning her role as a character in this narrative. In terms of identity, this speech-act posits Kālī as surprisingly forthright, given that she is speaking to the *mahādevī*. She does not speak to Caṇḍikā with deference, but rather with familiarity. Whereas the *deva*s in the text preface their speeches to Caṇḍikā with devotional *śloka*s, detailing the glory of the *mahādevī*,[90] Kālī simply speaks to her directly. The manner of her speech is exceptionally informal. Kālī's subtle suggestion that Caṇḍikā can now kill Śumbha and Niśumbha, given that Kālī has killed Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa for her, is unexpectedly haughty. Moreover, Kālī's identification of Caṇḍa's and Muṇḍa's heads as gifts for Caṇḍikā is a surprising reversal, given that Caṇḍikā is usually the one to give boons.[91] Despite the informality and brusqueness of Kālī's speech-act, the presentation of these severed heads to Caṇḍikā is, however, better understood as an offering rather than as a gift, as is discussed subsequently in greater depth. Kālī's apparent haughtiness, while seeming to suggest her assumption of a relationship between equals, is belied by this offering, which supports Kālī's role as secondary to the greater figure of the *mahādevī*. This secondary status is, however,

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[89] DM 7.22-23, Sanskrit: *śiraścaṇḍasya kālī ca gūhītvā muṇḍameva ca / prāha pracaṇḍāṭṭahāsamiśramabhyetya caṇḍikām // mayā tavātropahṛtai caṇḍamuṇḍai mahāpaśū / yuddhayajñe svayaṃ śumbhaṃ niśumbhaṃ ca haniṣyasi*.

[90] See, for example, DM 5.7-34.

[91] See, for example, Caṇḍikā's gifts to Suratha and Samādhi, DM 13.11-17. Caṇḍikā also refers to herself as "a boon-giver," DM 11.35.

significantly higher than that of other characters, such as the *deva*s who, as previously noted, approach Caṇḍikā in only submissive and deferential ways. Moreover, Caṇḍikā does not respond to Kālī's display of informality with anger, but instead playfully gives Kālī a new epithet, perhaps in reward for killing Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. This brief sentence thus implicitly describes Kālī as supremely confident and perhaps haughty, although aware of her subordinate status to the *mahādevī*. This scene also suggests that Kālī's high self-regard is warranted, considering that Caṇḍikā does not rebuke her for it. This short speech-act serves to suggest a high level of importance for Kālī, both as a character and as a component of text. No other character has this familiarity in his or her relationship with Caṇḍikā, including Caṇḍikā's own *śakti*, Śivadūtī, who is also the only other *devī*, excluding Caṇḍikā, to speak in the narrative. As is discussed further in Chapter Three, speech-acts seem to contribute to the determination of status in this text; Śivadūtī's high level of textual importance, given her relationship to the *mahādevī,* makes her speech-act more immediately understandable than that of Kālī. The text thus uses Kālī's speech-act both to construct Kālī's character as more visible, since dialogue is a more noticeable feature of a character's construction than are indirect narrative elements, and to posit Kālī as particularly important to the overall narrative.

Kālī's phrase for Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, 'two beasts slain in the sacrifice of battle,' is especially significant given the larger context of Sanskrit literature. The connection between sacrifice and battle is a theme present in other Sanskrit narratives, particularly in the *Mahābhārata*, as is the gory violence demonstrated by Kālī's character. W.J. Johnson notes that western scholarship interpreting the *Mahābhārata* through the use of sacrificial symbolism began with Madeleine Biardeau and has been developed further by Jacques Scheuer and Alf Hiltebeitel. This interpretive scheme sees the battles in the text as

reworkings of sacrificial themes in earlier traditions, in particular the Vedic sacrifices, within the developing *bhakti* context.[92] As Coburn has argued, the *Devī Māhātmya* may represent the beginning 'crystallisations' of *śākta* traditions, and perhaps the idea of the sacrifice of battle is being used by the text to rework previous religious themes – such as ritual sacrifice and *bhakti* to Śiva and Viṣṇu – within the emerging context of *śakt*ism. Agrawala, in his commentary on the text, states that Kālī's drinking of Raktabīja's blood is metaphorically and theologically "an offering of it [i.e. the blood] to the sacrificial process symbolised in the body of Kālī-Chāmuṇḍā."[93] Although a discussion of these theories in further detail is beyond the scope of this project, the presence of this theme in Sanskrit literature can allow for greater insight into the position of Kālī and her violence in the *Devī Māhātmya*. In particular, the *Sauptikaparvan* of the *Mahabharata* provides an excellent point of comparison with Kālī's actions in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as the *Sauptikaparvan* is also extraordinarily violent and gruesome, and its violence is predicated on wrathfulness directed against perceived injustice.

The *Sauptikaparvan* is the tenth book of the *Mahābhārata*, and occurs after the great battle between the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas has ended in victory for the Pāṇḍava brothers. During the battle several of the mightiest Kuru fighters were killed through the use of unfair battle tactics; one such warrior was Droṇa, the childhood teacher of both the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas. Droṇa, while fighting for the Kurus, told the Pāṇḍavas that only at the death of his son, Aśvatthāman, would he be able to be killed. After an elephant bearing

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[92] W.J Johnson, *The Sauptikaparvan of the Mahābhārata: The Massacre at Night* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxxv. See Madeleine Biardeau, "Études de mythologie hindoue (IV)," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 63 (1976): 111-263, as cited in Johnson; Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976); and Jacques Scheuer, *Śiva dans la Mahābhārata*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses, LXXXIV (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982).

[93] Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *Devī-Māhātmyam: The Glorification of the Great Goddess* (Varanasi: All-India Kashi Raj Trust, 1963), 209.

the same name as Droṇa's son is killed, the Pāṇḍavas imply to Droṇa that it is the human Aśvatthāman who is dead. Droṇa, in despair, allows himself to be slain. After the battle is won by the Pāṇḍavas, Aśvatthāman, who remains alive, swears vengeance for the unfair death of his father. Along with two other Kuru survivors, Kṛpa and Kṛtavarman, Aśvatthāman approaches the sleeping camp of the Pāṇḍava army and, possessed by a form of Śiva, slaughters the entire army. The five Pāṇḍava brothers, along with Kṛṣṇa, slept elsewhere and thus escape Aśvatthāman's wrath. Eventually Aśvatthāman is defeated, and Kṛṣṇa explains that in truth the slaughter of the Pāṇḍava army was the fault of Śiva, and connects this event to the myth of Dakṣa, in which Śiva destroys his father-in-law's sacrifice out of anger at the death of Satī.[94] The *Sauptikaparvan* is exceptional for its extreme violence, detailed in gory and horrific brutalities, and for the previously mentioned connections to earlier themes of ritual sacrifice.

There are a number of thematic similarities between the massacre in the *Sauptikaparvan* and Kālī's behaviour in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Both occur after an injustice has occurred or has been threatened: the *asura*s attempt to abduct Caṇḍikā and Aśvatthāman's father was killed unfairly in battle. Both are extremely violent and include detailed descriptions of mass slaughters complete with blood, gore, and unrestrained brutality. In both texts there is a sense of *bībhatsa*, or the disgusting, and *bhayānaka*, or the dreadful. Both Kālī and Aśvatthāman are wrathful, which leads to their extreme violence and evokes the *rasa* of *raudra*. Finally, it is worthwhile to note that the *Sauptikaparvan* includes a brief description of a figure remarkably similar to Kālī. This female figure, labelled by the *Sauptikaparvan* as "the Night of all-destroying Time,"[95] is black-skinned

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[94] For the verses in which Kṛṣṇa explains this to the Pāṇḍavas, see chapter 17 and 18 of the *Sauptikaparvan*.
[95] Sanskrit: *kālaratrī*.

with red eyes and a red mouth. Her adornments and lotions are red as well, and she wears a piece of red cloth. She chants and carries a noose, smiling as she leads men away to their death.[96] In the text she appears to the men in the sleeping Pāṇḍava army, and the text states that she also appeared to them in their dreams during the battle, to lead them away to be killed by Aśvatthāman. She is also explicitly labelled as a *devī*.[97] This figure thus acts as a symbol or precursor to the fate of the army, as it is clear from the text that it was the fate of the men to die. This *devī* is similar to Kālī in several ways: both have black skin, red eyes, and a mouth that commands attention, and both figures carry a noose. Thematically, both inspire fear and a sense of dread. Coburn considers this figure to be an early precursor of Kālī herself, and claims that this episode "represents a crucial stage in the growth of Kālī's identity."[98] He notes that this description is evidently marked by Kālī's gruesome and violent nature, and that she is associated with the mysterious or unknown.[99] Kate Crosby's translation of the *Sauptikaparvan* explicitly identifies the figure as Kālī, and the word or name *kālī*, in the accusative case, does appear in the Sanskrit text.[100] Some of the characteristics of the *devī* in the *Sauptikaparvan* that are not present in Kālī's depiction in the *Devī Māhātmya* are present in other textual descriptions of Kālī; in particular, her close association with death is a prevalent feature in those *tantr*ic texts discussing her figure. The combination of certain textual elements, including anger, horrific violence, perceived injustice, and gruesome, black-skinned, and violent *devī*s thus resonate within Sanskrit literature to provide a particular kind of atmosphere to the texts in which they appear.

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[96] Johnson, *Sauptikaparvan*, 8.64-65. See also the abridged translation of John D. Smith, *The Mahābhārata* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2009), 570.
[97] Johnson, *Sauptikaparvan*, 8.66-67.
[98] Thomas B. Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition (*Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 111.
[99] Ibid., 112.
[100] Kate Crosby, *Mahābhārata: Book Ten, Dead of Night. Book Eleven, The Women* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 78-79.

Kālī's character and behaviour in the *Devī Māhātmya* are an example of this particular trope or theme in Sanskrit literature, and are constructed as such by the *Devī Māhātmya*.

Before moving to the next section of this chapter, which discusses Kālī in her literary context outside of the *Devī Māhātmya*, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly the theme of ritual sacrifice present in both the *Sauptikaparvan* and Kālī's battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, as well as with Raktabīja. Examining Kālī's behaviour in the *Devī Māhātmya* through the lens of ritual sacrifice provides information concerning her character, particularly with respect to her larger literary context, in which she is often the recipient of sacrifices. In the *Devī Māhātmya*, the primary reference to the concept of battle as sacrifice occurs in Kālī's speech to Caṇḍikā, in which she refers to Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa as "beasts slain in the sacrifice of battle."[101] This brief reference suggests to the reader the idea of battle as a ritual sacrifice, particularly given the themes of injustice and rage previously constructed by the *Devī Māhātmya*, which mirror those themes present in texts such as the *Sauptikaparvan*. Thus Kālī's first battle, with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, acts to evoke this larger theme, which is already present in the literary context, as attested to by the *Mahābhārata* in particular. In this battle the concepts of Kālī and sacrificial worship are first connected to one another. Kālī's second major battle, in which she defeats Raktabīja by drinking his blood, suggests the contours and details of Kālī-devoted ritual sacrifices, which, in later literary and ritual traditions, offer blood nearly exclusively. The themes of outraged violence and ritual sacrifice thus function in the *Devī Māhātmya* to construct Kālī's character, and these themes continue to influence her character in subsequent literary traditions.

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[101] DM 7.23.

Grotesquery, Violence, & Wrath in Kālī's Literary Context

The qualities important to Kālī's characterisation in the *Devī Māhātmya* discussed in this chapter remain integral parts of her character throughout Hindu literary traditions. Her associations with extreme violence and gory behaviour shape her textual representations in other *purāṇa*s, in *tantr*ic texts, and in the Bengali *bhakti* poetry dedicated to her figure. While the *Devī Māhātmya* represents the first extant text in which Kālī appears as a fully-fleshed character, certain elements of her character do appear in some earlier textual material, as noted by Coburn and as discussed above.[102] Such appearances include the previously discussed figure in the *Sauptikaparvan*, and perhaps some early prototypes in the Vedic material; Kinsley claims that the *devī*s Rātridevī and Nirṛti may function in this manner.[103] Previous scholarship focusing on Kālī has tended to examine her traits in the *Devī Māhātmya* solely with reference to the ways by which they foreshadow later characterisations, as discussed in Chapter One. This section will instead take the character traits that this chapter has identified as fundamental to Kālī's character in the *Devī Māhātmya* and look to later textual traditions to determine their importance for Kālī's character in Hindu traditions more generally. While it is not the intention of this thesis to place the Kālī of the *Devī Māhātmya* in a literary chronology, a brief discussion of these identified character themes as they appear throughout the general trajectory of her textual representation sheds greater light on her role in the *Devī Māhātmya*, and may also provide new avenues of thought for Kālī studies. To this end, this section briefly examines several of Kālī's textual representations in the *purāṇa*s, in a select few *tantr*ic texts, and in Bengali devotional poetry, particularly that of Rāmprasād Sen and Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya. This

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[102] Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*, 110-113.
[103] David Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000[1975]), 87.

survey demonstrates the foundational nature of the qualities of wrath, gruesome violence, intoxication, fear, and revulsion for Kālī's character throughout much of her textual representation.

Kālī appears in a number of *purāṇa*s, including the *Agni Purāṇa*, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Liṅga Purāṇa*, the *Skanda Purāṇa*, and the *Vāmana Purāṇa*.[104] In these texts she is often closely connected to the *devī* Pārvatī; as Kinsley notes, Kālī embodies Pārvatī's wrath or destructive aspects in a similar way to her personification of Caṇḍikā's fury in the *Devī Māhātmya*. In the *Liṅga Purāṇa*, Śiva asks Pārvatī to kill the *asura* Dāruka, who can be killed only by a female. Pārvatī enters Śiva's body, drinks the poison he stores in his throat,[105] and emerges as Kālī, accompanied by *piśāca*s, or flesh-eating spirits. She then destroys Dāruka.[106] In the same *purāṇa*, Kālī accompanies Śiva during his campaign against Tripura. In this passage, she carries a trident, wears skulls and the hide of an elephant, and her eyes are half-closed due to her intoxication from drinking the blood of the *asura*s. She is associated with Pārvatī here again.[107] The *Vāmana Purāṇa* includes a story of Kālī's emergence that is quite similar to the one found in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Pārvatī, offended when Śiva refers to her as 'Kālī' because of her dark skin, succeeds in removing it to reveal her golden form below.[108] The sheath transforms into a furious warrior *devī* called Kauśikī, who in turn creates Kālī while enraged.[109] As in the

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[104] This project is deeply indebted to the work of David Kinsley, who lists Kālī's *purāṇ*ic references in many of his articles. See especially "Kālī" in *Hindu Goddesses*, "Kālī: The Black Goddess" in *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and "The Sword: Kālī, Mistress of Death" in *The Sword and the Flute*.

[105] The poison is described in the common myth of Śiva Nīlakaṇtha, in which Śiva drinks the poison that emerges from the churning of the ocean and stores it in his throat so that the poison does not destroy the world.

[106] *The Liṅga-Purāṇa*, trans. A Board of Scholars (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990[1973]), chapter 106.

[107] Ibid., chapter 72: 66-68.

[108] Sanskrit: *gaurī*.

[109] *The Vāmana Purāṇa: With English Translation*, trans. Satyamsu Mohan Mukhopadhyaya et al. (Varanasi: All India Kashiraj Trust, 1968), chapter 28: 6-25. The emergence of Kālī is quoted by David Kinsley.

Devī Māhātmya, Kālī is portrayed as the dark, violent aspect of a *devī*, often Pārvatī, and is associated with blood-drinking, battle, and a ferocious and terrible appearance. In both the *Agni* and *Garuḍa Purāṇa*s she is associated with violent war and victory in battle,[110] and in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* with thieves and *asura*s. In this *purāṇa* she is described as having a dreadful face, large teeth, and a loud laugh. She is also depicted drinking the blood of humans.[111] In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, a figure similar to Kālī comes forth after Pārvatī knits her eyebrows and rubs the tip of her nose in anger.[112] Thus, in *purāṇ*ic texts other than the *Mārkaṇḍeya*, Kālī remains connected to themes of anger, destructive and excessive violence, and gruesomeness; she is also conceived of as specific aspects of other *devī*s, in particular their wrathful or darker selves; and she is, as Kinsley points out, frequently associated with those on the periphery of society,[113] as well as with *asur*ic figures. Kālī's association with repulsive concepts or substances is strengthened in those *tantr*ic texts discussing her figure, which *tantra* frequently conceives of as the supreme ontological reality.

Hindu *tantr*ic traditions often venerate a group of *devī*s called the ten *mahāvidyā*s, of whom Kālī is the pre-eminent figure. In the *Śaktisaṁgama Tantra*, Kālī is said to be the primary deity, with all other deities conceived of as different forms that Kālī periodically assumes.[114] Kālī's centrality in *tantra* is attested to by numerous texts, including Abinavagupta's *Tantraloka*, the Bengali *Tantrasāra*, *Śāktapramoda*, and *Prāṇatoṣiṇī*, and the *Yoginī*, *Kāmākhyā*, *Kāmadā*, *Mahānirvāṇa*, and *Niruttara Tantra*s, among others. Kinsley claims that Kālī's prominence in *tantra*, given the available information, is

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[110] *The Agni Purāṇa*, trans. N. Gangadharan (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), chapter 135; *The Garuḍa Purāṇa*, trans. A Board of Scholars (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), chapter 38.
[111] *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, trans. Ganesh Vaseudeo Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976-78), 5.9.12-20.
[112] *The Skanda-Purāṇa*, trans. G.V. Tagare (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997), chapter 82: 9-22.
[113] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 116.
[114] Kinsley, *Tantric Visions*, 68.

primarily due to the ritual nature of *tantra* generally, the polarity of *tantr*ic thought, and the idea in left-handed *tantra* that the polluting and unclean aspects of the world must be experienced in order to be transcended.[115] Kālī's close association with polluting and revolting substances and concepts, particularly blood and death, tie her closely to *tantr*ic ideas about pollution and transcendence. These concepts are also meant to cause fear, as such responses must be overcome by the *sādhaka* or *vīra*, the *tantr*ic practitioner. Intoxicants are also important to *tantr*ic practitioners; alcohol, in particular, is often used during rituals. In *tantra*, Kālī is no longer seen as the personification of another *devī*'s anger, but as the supreme ontological reality itself. As in the *Devī Māhātmya*, Kālī's extreme violence and gruesomeness are highlighted, and in fact augmented: the *Karpurādi Stotra*, which described a *tantr*ic ritual designed to take place in the cremation grounds, portrays Kālī as having blood trickling from her mouth and as being surrounded by skulls, bones, and female jackals; this representation is more grotesque than that in the *Devī Māhātmya*.[116] Many of Kālī's features in the *Devī Māhātmya* are thus maintained in her depiction in *tantr*ic literature. However, there are a few significant differences between the Kālī of the *Devī Māhātmya* and the *tantr*ic Kālī. First, Kālī is less associated with anger in *tantra* than in the *purāṇ*ic material. Second, Kālī is closely linked to sexual activity in *tantr*ic literature and ritual. Finally, as Kinsley noted in context with the lessening importance of anger in Kālī's depiction, Kālī is now seen not as a furious aspect of the *mahādevī*, but as the primary deity and ultimate reality herself. This shift in Kālī's position during the time between the *Devī Māhātmya* and the *tantr*ic literature, particularly those texts associated with the left-handed practices, is not well understood. Yet, as Kinsley

[115] Ibid., 78.
[116] Ibid.

argued, Kālī's close and gruesome association with polluting substances, clearly indicated in the *Devī Māhātmya* with her predilection for drinking blood, probably contributed to her rise to prominence in *tantra*, as did her extreme violence and thematic connections to death.

Bengali *śākta bhakti* poetry also represents Kālī as grotesque and violent, despite significant shifts in the textual descriptions. This poetry, much of which is Kālī-devoted, began its development in the eighteenth century, during a time of great societal unrest in Bengal.[117] The two most celebrated poets in this tradition are Rāmprasād Sen (ca. 1718-1775) and Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya (ca. 1769-1821); many poems are attributed to these two poets. Both composed poetry for courtly patrons and both are considered to have been *tantr*ic adepts and devotees of Kālī.[118] Their poetry, along with Bengali *śākta* devotional poetry more generally, was heavily influenced by particular aspects of *tantra*, including the literary descriptions of Kālī's form and the *stotra*s praising her, as well as by the Bengali *maṅgalakāvya* literature, which elaborates upon the exploits of various deities. In the seventeenth century Kālī was incorporated into this latter textual tradition, and while her representations maintain some of her gruesome features, such as the skull adornments and the blood, she is beautified by the addition of jewellery and bells. This beautification was also adopted by the later *śākta* poets devoted to Kālī. Their poetry was further influenced by the Bengali Vaiṣṇava poetic tradition devoted to Kṛṣṇa, which provided inspiration both for the form of the poetry and for the content, since Kālī is beautified in ways that parallel descriptions of Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa's lover. Finally, much of the inspiration for this poetry developed from the local sayings, expressions, attitudes, and lifestyles; there are thus many

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[117] Rachel Fell McDermott's book *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Umā In the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) discusses this situation in greater depth, with particular reference to the rise of *śākta* poets in Bengal. See especially Part One, Section One: The Historical Background in Bengal, 15-36.

[118] Rachel Fell McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess: Poems to Kālī and Umā from Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8.

references to farmers, debts, merchants, annual religious festivals, poverty, and so forth.[119] In this poetic tradition, many of the poems describe Kālī in familiar terms: she is grotesque, violent, associated with the battleground, connected to death, depicted with ghosts, ghouls, and *rākṣasa* companions, and is always covered in or smeared with blood.[120] Her characteristic gruesomeness and violence remain foundational here as well. However, even in the poems that describe Kālī in her most frightening and horrific forms, she has been made less terrifying by the addition of traditionally feminine adornments, including jewellery. She is also more often said to be physically beautiful, with high, round breasts and a face likened to the full moon.[121] Rāmprasād Sen describes her as "exquisite," even while her "thighs [are] streaming with blood,"[122] and Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya calls her a "beauty" with "a dreadful face."[123] This beautification is even more obvious in those poems that refrain from discussing Kālī's characteristic repulsive appearance and behaviour. In Bengali Kālī-devoted poetry, one of the most surprising themes is the constant addressing of Kālī as 'Mother.' While *tantra* often described Kālī as a cosmic mother, in the sense that she creates and sustains – and ultimately destroys – the universe, the relationship described in these poems is much closer and more intimate. Unsurprisingly, Kālī is often castigated by the poets for being a terrible mother, who frequently ignores those who love her to cavort with Śiva, to dance around naked, and to destroy *asura*s or *rākṣasa*s on the battlefield. For example, Mahendranāth Bhaṭṭācārya claims that while he is poor, his mother, Kālī, dances on the corpse of Śiva, ignoring him. He cries, "You have given me so

[119] Ibid., 6.
[120] See especially "Kālī among the Corpses: Poems of Battle" in McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 19-37.
[121] This is a common trope indicating beauty in Indian literature.
[122] Rāmprasād Sen, in McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 23.
[123] Kamalākānta Bhaṭṭācārya, in McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 25-26.

much pain, Mā, but still I forget it all, still I call You: 'Mā! Mā!'."[124] Despite her outrageous appearance and behaviour, these poets are still devoted to her as a mother figure. While she is depicted quite differently in these poems than she was in the early literature, particularly in the *Devī Māhātmya*, several important elements remain constant: her penchant for battle, her unconventional appearance, and her associations with the repulsive and the disgusting.

The characteristics identified in this chapter as being the primary aspects of Kālī's character as portrayed in the *Devī Māhātmya* are also foundational traits within her larger literary context. Kālī's repulsive and grotesque appearance and behaviour are described in the *purāṇa*s, in the *tantra*s, and in the Bengali devotional poetry, as is her proclivity for aggression and violence. These traits thus epitomise Kālī's literary character across multiple textual traditions. Moreover, several of the secondary traits present in the *Devī Māhātmya*'s characterisation of Kālī become increasingly important in other traditions: in particular, Kālī's association with peripheral figures, including *asura*s, *rākṣasa*s, and thieves, and her intoxication, usually from blood. Many of her qualities in this text also become more pronounced in those later texts, particularly *tantra*s, that devote more space to describing Kālī's physical appearance. These include her emaciation, her lolling tongue, wide mouth, and sharp fangs, her grisly adornments, and her penchant for howling and laughing. Some of the larger literary context includes qualities or aspects of Kālī that are not present in her depiction in the *Devī Māhātmya*, including her position as a mother-figure, her beauty, and her association with sexuality. Despite these differences, it is clear that the predominant qualities in the *Devī Māhātmya*'s portrayal of Kālī are also integral aspects to her character in the majority of her literary context; indeed, it is Kālī's

[124] Mahendranāth Bhaṭṭācārya, in McDermott, *Singing to the Goddess*, 54.

gruesomeness and extreme violence that ensure the recognition of these representations as depictions of Kālī herself.

Characterisation, Textual Space, & Some Remarks on Being Narratively Essential

Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* is an exceptionally violent and brutal character, whose ferocity is both mirrored and amplified by her gruesome and horrific physical appearance. She sets herself above all of the other characters except for Caṇḍikā, with whom she displays an easy familiarity and who accepts this familiarity without rebuke; she diminishes the *asura*s by eating them and she never speaks to nor acknowledges the presence of any characters aside from Caṇḍikā and the *asura* enemies. She is repeatedly connected to wrath or rage through both textual description and imagery, and she frequently makes tremendous amounts of noise, drowning out all others, including Caṇḍikā. Many of her actions centre around her mouth, which is her most frequently referenced physical feature, and which acts as a locus for much of her identity: consuming enemies, noise-making, and blood-drinking. She is angry, haughty, violent, dismissive of others, and grotesque in appearance and behaviour. Her motivations seem to be limited to causing destruction and consuming other beings; she displays no loyalty to Caṇḍikā nor to the *deva*s, and her willingness to fight for the *deva*s can be explained only by her connections to Caṇḍikā and by the opportunity this alliance gives her for battle. It is for these reasons that an attempt to align her along the traditional 'flat' and 'round' binary is problematic, as her complexity derives more from the particular textual strategies used the text to position her than from her own nature. Moreover, much of her identity is left unknown by the text: her origins are unclear, her motivations, such as a reader might understand them, simplistic, and even her status as a *devī* is tenuous, as will be discussed in the following chapter. It would be easy, then, to

dismiss Kālī as a 'flat' and unimportant character, despite the vast amount of information conveyed by these brief textual mentions, and yet her position in the text is so peculiar that it demands attention. By describing her in certain ways and by giving her certain actions to perform, the text subtly positions Kālī as an important character through several significant narrative strategies: her unique status as a horrific and grotesque figure, the use of textual space with respect to her character, and her position as narratively essential to the text's storyline, particularly that of the Śumbha and Niśumbha episode.

Before moving to the literary analysis of this section, it is worthwhile to revisit briefly the work of Mieke Bal and Kevin McGrath, discussed in Chapter One, whose works on character have profoundly shaped the analysis in this project. Kevin McGrath, who analysed Karṇa in the *Mahābhārata*, organises his work by considering particular features of Karṇa's characterisation. McGrath's sections concerning the character's name, storyline, physical attributes, and speech-acts have particularly informed this thesis' analysis, and Kālī's speech-act serves to indicate her narrative importance to the text, as discussed below. As Karṇa is also a character in a mythological Indian narrative, McGrath's work has been particularly helpful in determining Kālī's position in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Partially because of the kinds of characters found in mythological texts, Mieke Bal dismisses the traditional distinction between 'flat' and 'round' characters and instead proposes that character is shaped through four particular textual devices: repetition, accumulation, relations to other characters, and transformations.[125] Furthermore, her assertion that readers learn about character through explicit and implicit qualifications is particularly relevant to this project, as much of Kālī's character is conveyed through her actions, from which implicit qualifications are then deduced. Utilising Bal's approach to character provides a great deal

[125] Bal, *Narratology*, 126-127.

of information about Kālī’s figure in the *Devī Māhātmya*. The repetition and accumulation of Kālī’s grotesque and extreme violence serve to place her in a unique position in the text. The contours of this position would be significantly less visible without paying attention to character by following Bal’s method.

Kālī’s unique status in the text depends primarily upon her gruesome appearance and behaviour. While several other characters also act in strange, violent, angry, or disgusting ways, the intensity of this combination is peculiar to Kālī’s portrayal. Moreover, it is the textual attention paid to Kālī’s gruesomeness and violence that render her character so highly visible in the text. The details of Kālī in comparison to other characters are articulated more fully in Chapter Three; it is sufficient to note here the ways by which the text succeeds in positioning Kālī as a unique character primarily by virtue of her own characteristics. As previously noted, Kālī is not the only character in the *Devī Māhātmya* to act or appear in strange and frightening ways. Śivadūtī is frightening in appearance; Nārasiṃhī, Śivadūtī and Caṇḍikā’s lion all devour the enemy *asura*s; and many characters are ferocious and violent, including Caṇḍikā herself. Kālī is also not the only *devī* to speak: Śivadūtī speaks imperiously to Śiva, and Caṇḍikā frequently converses with other characters. However, the text repeatedly draws the attention of the reader to Kālī’s gruesomeness and violence through the accumulation and repetition of various repulsive details of Kālī’s character, thus ensuring that Kālī is the most gruesome and the most violent of the characters in the text. No other character, save for Caṇḍikā, is described in such detail; no other *devī*, aside from Caṇḍikā, has her battle actions detailed so thoroughly; no other character even approaches the level of grotesquery and brutality that is a notable feature of Kālī’s representation from her first appearance. The only other minor *devī* to speak is Śivadūtī, and even Śivadūtī does not address the *mahādevī*, let alone with Kālī’s

familiarity. Through the frequent and detailed highlighting of these aspects of Kālī, the text renders her both highly visible and guaranteed to grasp the attention of the reader; the contrast between Kālī and the other characters demonstrates the vividness of her behaviour and appearance. Moreover, while Caṇḍikā's violence certainly matches that of Kālī's, Caṇḍikā is also portrayed throughout the text as beautiful, benevolent, imperious, and so forth; this host of character traits serves to weaken the importance of violence as a primary trait of Caṇḍikā's characterisation. Kālī, however, is only ever violent, wrathful, and gruesome; her violence, anger, and gruesomeness are intensified by the lack of any other important characteristics in the construction of her character. Finally, it is Kālī who gruesomely drinks Raktabīja's blood; Caṇḍikā restrains herself merely to slaughtering him once he is bloodless. The intensity of Kālī's primary character traits serves to indicate her importance to the narrative as a whole; she would not be posited in such striking and unique ways were it not important to the text that she be present as the epitome of violence and gruesomeness in the narrative.

A more mechanical way to approach the question of Kālī's importance to the text is to consider the nature of textual space in the narrative, as well as Kālī's position within that space. This includes not only the amount of text discussing Kālī in comparison to that involving the text's other characters, but also the importance and size of the scenes in which she is the primary character, and the relation of the subnarrative in which she appears to the larger text of the *Devī Māhātmya*. The concept of textual space is particularly significant with regard to Kālī, as she is an important character despite the minimal amount of textual space devoted to her. It seems clear that a larger number of verses devoted to a particular subject increases the importance of that subject to the text; this assumption is evidently true for the characterisation of Caṇḍikā, who occupies the majority of the textual

space in the *Devī Māhātmya*. However, this situation is less clear with regard to Kālī. Passages mentioning Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* make up only a tiny portion of the total verses in the text: only 39 verses reference Kālī at all. Even in the third episode, which is the only portion of the text in which Kālī appears, Kālī is mentioned in slightly more than a tenth of the verses. However, textual space and its ability to determine the importance of a subject do not depend solely on a simple verse-count, useful though it may be for preliminary analyses. The *Devī Māhātmya* as a whole is composed of approximately 600 verses, depending on the manuscript consulted. The text is traditionally considered to have 700 verses, and is thus alternately titled the *Durgā-Saptaśatī*, or *Seven Hundred* (*Verses*) *to Durgā*, yet most editions have fewer verses than the traditional standard. Thomas Coburn's version, translated from the Harikṛṣṇaśarma edition, has 579 verses, although he also indicates the ways by which the text might be divided differently so that the verses number 700, in accordance with a contemporary Gujarati edition.[126] Kālī is present for much of the Śumbha and the Niśumbha episode, itself a significant subnarrative, which is composed of 339 verses in Thomas Coburn's translation, or more than half of the overall text. This episode is also the only one of the three episodes in the *Devī Māhātmya* to include the presence of *devī*s other than Caṇḍikā herself. Several points immediately attest to Kālī's importance in this subnarrative, which in turn supports her importance to the text as a whole, given the position of this episode with relation to the larger text. First, an entire book is devoted to her début scene. While this book, the seventh, contains only 25 verses,[127] the fact that it concerns itself almost exclusively with Kālī marks her as a significant character. Second, Kālī is the first *devī* other than Caṇḍikā to appear in the *Devī*

[126] Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess*, 31.
[127] It is not the shortest book (which is the thirteenth book with 17 verses) although it has fewer than the average number of verses per book (44.5).

Māhātmya. The other *devī*s, who are more properly referred to as *śakti*s, do not appear until the eighth book. Kālī is immediately posited as an important character by this textual positioning, indicating her importance to the text as a whole.

Kālī's textual presence in particular passages also reinforces her significance to the *Devī Māhātmya* in its entirety. The vast majority of those verses that directly reference Kālī occur when she is the primary acting figure in the passages described; it is rare that she is described in a passing sense as a secondary character. The passages in which she is the primary character are her début battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and her battle with Raktabīja. In these cases the visibility of her character is extraordinarily high: she is the only non-*asura* character for nearly the entirety of her début battle, and she is directly responsible for ensuring Raktabīja's death. Thus while determining textual space by verse-count is certainly useful for understanding the importance of a subject to a text, the significance of textual space is also determined by the quality of that space. Most of Kālī's textual space posits her as the most important character in the passage in which she appears, and despite the low verse-count associated with her, she is described more fully than any other character in the text aside from Caṇḍikā. It is thus clear that the limited textual space devoted to her is used by the text to highlight her character in striking and significant ways.

A final method by which the *Devī Māhātmya* ensures the importance of the position of Kālī's character is through the use of narrative essentiality, or the cohesiveness of the narrative in the text. The text constructs Kālī as necessary to the successful outcome of the battle with Raktabīja through the repeated mentions of her predilection for consuming *asura*s, her accumulated gruesome and violent characteristics, and through the use of Caṇḍikā's authority. By the time the narrative arrives at the battle of Raktabīja, it is clear that Kālī must be the one to incapacitate him in order to maintain narrative cohesiveness,

given the repeated mentions of her violence and her accumulated character traits. Upon reading the text, particularly for the first time, the reader is given the sense that Kālī 'saved the day' through her willingness to drink Raktabīja's blood; given her previous battle techniques, it is clear that she is portrayed as wanting to drink his blood, rather than that being simply willing to do so. The text gives a sense of urgency to the situation, despite the obvious theological necessity that Caṇḍikā must be able to slay Raktabīja, since she is by definition all-powerful, and despite the presence of characters other than Kālī who have previously shown a willingness to consume *asur*ic flesh and blood. Śivadūtī, Caṇḍikā's lion, and Nārasiṃhī could have consumed the Raktabīja-replicas and the blood, since the text explicitly describes their devouring of enemy *asura*s. Yet Caṇḍikā's direction to Kālī to consume the blood suggests that Kālī is the best suited among the *devī*s to perform this task. Furthermore, while Caṇḍikā's lion is the only character explicitly described as drinking blood previous to Raktabīja's dying scene,[128] it would have been strange if he had drunk Raktabīja's blood. The text is devoted to the exaltation of *devī*s, as forms of the *mahādevī*, thus making it narratively important that a *devī* – and not a lion – incapacitate Raktabīja. While it is conceivable that Śivadūtī or Nārasiṃhī could have consumed Raktabīja's blood without disrupting the narrative, the choice of Kālī as the instrument of Raktabīja's defeat shifts the frequent references to her mouth and to her predilection for eating her enemies to the level of foreshadowing. Kālī's mouth has been so consistently linked to her character and to her violence that Caṇḍikā's directive to her specifically includes it:

> "O Cāmuṇḍā, open wide your mouth.
> With this mouth of yours, quickly take in the drops of blood produced by the fall of my weapons

[128] DM 6.14.

> And the great demons who are born from that blood.
> Roam about on the battlefield, consuming the great demons who are born from him.
> Thus will this demon, his blood dried up, meet his destruction.
> In this way, these terrible ones will be consumed by you, and no more will be born."[129]

Kālī is also a much larger and more significant presence in the text than either Nārasiṃhī or Śivadūtī, as is demonstrated both through the use of textual space and through the relative importance of their actions. Kālī's position in the text thus far ensures that the narrative posit her as the cause of Raktabīja's death, itself an important episode in the *Devī Māhātmya*. This passage is the only occurrence in the text where it seems possible that the *devī*s might not win the battle, and the text augments this suspense by describing the *deva*s as afraid, despite their faith in Caṇḍikā.[130] Furthermore, the battle with Raktabīja is the penultimate battle of the text, indicating that it is second only to the final confrontation with Śumbha and Niśumbha in importance and difficulty. Kālī's position as narratively essential to Raktabīja's defeat thus indicates her importance to the narrative of the *Devī Māhātmya* as a whole.

Both David Kinsley and Thomas Coburn consider Kālī to be an important character in the *Devī Māhātmya*, although they do not closely analyse her role therein. Kinsley states that Kālī is the *mahādevī*'s "most important companion-form and a great warrior,"[131] and Coburn claims that, of all the epithets used in the text, 'Kālī' is the term that most represents a proper name and is not merely another term for Caṇḍikā.[132] By this Coburn suggests that Kālī is more distinct from the *mahādevī* than are the other *devī*s in the text,

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[129] DM 8.23-55, Sanskrit: *cāmuṇḍe vistirṇaṃ vadanaṃ kuru // macchastrapātasambhūtān raktabindūnmahāsurān / raktabindoḥ pratīccha tvaṃ vaktreṇānena veginā // bhakṣayantī cara raṇe tadutpatnānmahāsurān / evameṣa kṣayaṃ daityaḥ kṣīṇarakto gamiṣyati // bhakṣyamāṇāktvayā cogrā na cotyatsyanti cāpare .*

[130] DM 8.51.

[131] David Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess in the Devī-māhātmya." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 4 (1978): 493.

[132] Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*, 108.

with a richer and more complex characterisation. This is further highlighted by Kālī's epithet or second name, Cāmuṇḍā, with which the text explicitly conflates her. Kālī is the only character aside from Caṇḍikā to merit an epithet, indicating again her status in the text; that it was the *mahādevī* herself who appointed this epithet only serves to strengthen this status. The epithet may also suggest that Kālī and Cāmuṇḍā were previously independent *devī*s; this is, however, only speculative.[133] The possibility of the integration of two *devī*s does serve to point towards the larger theological objective of the *Devī Māhātmya*, which is to promote the *mahādevī* as the primary ontological reality, with all other aspects of reality, including the other *devī*s, subsumed into her; Kālī's possible absorption of Cāmuṇḍā may serve as a lesser example of this phenomenon. Many of the points discussed in this chapter thus support the conclusions of Coburn and Kinsley with respect to Kālī: by virtue of her strange, arresting figure, the nature of the textual space devoted to her and her behaviour, and the importance of her major scene for maintaining narrative cohesion, Kālī is constructed by the text to be an important character who merits close study and attention.

Concluding Remarks

The *Devī Māhātmya* constructs the character of Kālī through a variety of textual devices, including the repetition and accumulation of character traits and behaviours and the use of certain themes present in the larger Sanskrit literary corpus. Her character traits

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[133] As Coburn notes, Cāmuṇḍā was not a term used previously in any Vedic or epic literature; the origin of the name remains unclear (Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*, 135). Frederick Eden Pargiter, in his introduction to his translation of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, claims that the *Devī Māhātmya* is the first instance of the name in Sanskrit (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1904), xii. Coburn notes that it is thus likely that Cāmuṇḍā was a non-Sanskritic *devī* assimilated into the *mahādevī* by way of identification with Kālī. This conclusion can only be tentative, however, given the nearly complete lack of evidence surrounding the name. Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*, 135-36. David Kinsley notes that Hindu texts normally distinguish Kālī from Cāmuṇḍā and that the two have different appearances; this, however, refers to later literary and theological developments. *Tantric Visions*, 16.

serve to indicate her unique position in the text, as no other character is portrayed with the same intensity of gruesomeness, violence, and wrathfulness. Her behaviour also indicates her importance to the text: Kālī speaks familiarly to Caṇḍikā without rebuke, Caṇḍikā gives Kālī an epithet, and Kālī, at the behest of Caṇḍikā, is crucial to the success of the penultimate conflict in which she directly causes Raktabīja's defeat. Kālī's character traits can be analysed with recourse to the Indian literary theory of *rasa*, thus providing thematic context for Kālī's character, and leading to the identification of the primary characteristic of anger, which features heavily in other *purāṇ*ic narratives in which Kālī appears. The themes of anger, violence, and grotesque appearance and behaviour are predominant in the majority of Kālī's textual traditions, and serve to position her as unique in the *Devī Māhātmya*. The descriptions and analyses of Kālī in this chapter foreshadow the following chapter, in which her unique position and striking characteristics are placed in context with the other characters. Kālī functions as a paradigmatic character in this larger character context, and her wrath, gruesomeness, and violence serve to indicate her position as a particular *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*. This is particularly clear when Kālī's characteristics are compared to those of the *asura* characters, as she bears a striking similarity to them. Kālī's position in the *Devī Māhātmya* thus plays a significant role in the larger theological objective of the text, which is to present the *mahādevī* as the supreme reality, incorporating all aspects of the cosmos, including the *asura*s, into herself.

Chapter Three: A Monstrous Goddess

Ambiguities between *dev*ic figures and *asura*s are not uncommon in Indian mythic literature, and are often expressed through similarities in their respective descriptions and by imprecision in the labels themselves. Similarities between the groups date back to early Vedic texts and continue throughout Hindu mythic narratives. In Vedic hymns, the term *asura* sometimes denoted a particular kind of *deva*, rather than a different class of beings altogether. This suggests that within Hindu literature more broadly, there is some confusion as to the precise nature and origin of the *deva*s, the *asura*s, and the conflicts between them. Moreover, these ambiguities are more numerous and more visible with respect to the *devī*s in mythological texts than with respect to the *deva*s, although there are exceptions to this pattern. Kālī, as a specific character in the *Devī Māhātmya*, is a clear example of this ambiguity, and her role in this text suggests that the early conflation of *deva*s and *asura*s remains visible in the text's expression of the theological concept of the *mahādevī*. As an *asur*ic *devī* Kālī expresses the *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*, and the construction of her figure brings together *asur*ic and *dev*ic concepts. Ambiguities are also present in Kālī's textual representations more generally; in the previous chapter, reference was made to Kālī's later associations with *rākṣas*ic and *asur*ic figures. Her character type is made clear through a consideration of her character traits in context with both the *asura* and the *devī* characters in the *Devī Māhātmya*. The *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī* is a essential correlate to the theological construction of an all-encompassing supreme reality, as the *mahādevī* must necessarily include *asur*ic elements. This *asur*ic aspect is referenced explicitly in the *Devī Māhātmya*, and the text labels it as the *mahāsurī*. Kālī, through her ambiguous status as an *asur*ic *devī*, is constructed by the *Devī Māhātmya* to be this *mahāsurī*; such an

identification has significance both for Kālī's figure and for the status of the *devī*s in the text and in Hindu traditions more generally.

Character Types in the *Devī Māhātmya*

The nature of Hindu sacred figures is often archetypical, and these figures exist as important and easily recognisable characters in the larger context of Hindu mythic narratives. As Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg point out, "all readers of literature carry around with them notions about character and incident, in the form of unconsciously consulted touchstones which shape their evaluations of literary works."[1] Chapter One of this project discussed in some detail the position of *deva*s, *devī*s, and *asura*s in the cultural world which produced and maintained the *Devī Māhātmya*; while this section deals primarily with the construction of character types based on the characters as presented in the *Devī Māhātmya*, the historicity of these figures in Hindu literature more broadly is an important aspect to their portrayals in this text. Notions about *deva*s and *asura*s, in particular, and about the conflicts which shape their stories, play a significant role in this text, both for the construction of the *mahādevī* and for the pattern of the narrative. This chapter begins by briefly describing the three main character groups of the *Devī Māhātmya*, and analyses these groups individually to determine a particular character type common to each larger category. Kālī's position as the *mahāsur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī* is made visible through her similarities to and differences from the *asura*s and the other *devī*s, as well as her close relationship with Caṇḍikā. The construction of these character types serves to highlight Kālī's own character type in sharper detail. A division of a narrative's characters based on types is an approach exemplified in Indian literary theory: in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharata

[1] Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 40th anniversary edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006[1966]), 160.

discusses the types of male and female characters found in a drama, and divides them into categories based on various criteria. These criteria include status, age, and function within the world of the text. Larger types are divided further based on the absence or presence of certain distinguishing characteristics. Although these characteristics may occur in multiple categories, it is the clustering of certain traits that clearly indicates a unique group. Thus while the characters are classified based upon their functions and their relationships with other textual figures, their identifying characteristics are also important to this analysis.[2]

Character Types: The Gods

The *deva*s are important characters in the *Devī Māhātmya* primarily because of their vulnerability to *asura*s, which requires that the *mahādevī*, Caṇḍikā, support the *deva*s in battle. This vulnerability drives the narrative, particularly in the second and third subnarratives, in which Caṇḍikā fights the *asura*s while the *deva*s watch. The position of the *deva*s differs significantly between the first episode, in which only two *deva*s, Viṣṇu and Brahmā, are present,[3] and the second and third episodes, in which the *deva*s are present as a group. In the second and third episodes the *deva*s as a whole are posited to be the rightful occupiers of the heavenly offices, which confers upon them both authority and access to portions of the sacrifices, presumably performed on earth by humans. Indra is considered to be the chief of these deities, who are said to be thirty in number.[4] Brahmā is also present in the second episode, and although he is not their chief he leads this group of

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[2] Bharata, *The Nāṭyaśāstra: English Translation with Critical Notes*, trans. Adya Rangacharya (New Delhi: Mushiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1996), 330-335.

[3] The two *deva*s present are Brahmā and Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu's cosmic serpent, Śeṣa, is also present (1.49), although it is not clear if Śeṣa is in fact a *deva*. In the second episode, in which the *deva*s give body parts, weapons and ornaments to Caṇḍikā, Śeṣa gives her a necklace (2.29), suggesting that he does in fact belong in the list of *deva*s, at least in the second episode. However, given Śeṣa's clear subordinance to Viṣṇu in the first episode, only Viṣṇu and Brahmā are considered to be *deva*s here.

[4] DM 2.4.

*deva*s when they travel to the abodes of Śiva and Viṣṇu, asking for their assistance after the defeat to Mahiṣāsura and his troops.[5] In both the second and third subnarratives the *deva*s lose their positions to the *asura*s and regain them following Caṇḍikā's destruction of the *asura* forces. The *deva*s are clearly the proper occupiers of these heavenly positions, and their rightful occupation of these offices restores the universe to a state of harmony following the chaos of the *asura*s' attempt to de-throne the *deva*s:

> When that wicked one [Śumbha] was dead, the whole universe became soothed
> Regaining its natural condition once more, and the sky became spotless.[6]

The *deva*s cannot, however, protect these offices against the *asura*s. The *deva*s are posited as the weakest group of characters in the narrative, and are associated with heavenly beings and objects that do not suggest fierce, battle-oriented natures, such as *ṛṣi*s, *gandharva*s, and *apsaras*es, and perfumes, ointments, heavenly incense, and heavenly flowers from Indra's pleasure garden.[7] The *deva*s' weakness in battle is particularly evident in the third episode, in which the *deva*s do not even struggle against the *asura*s, who simply take away their offices, authorities, kingdoms, weapons, and even mounts.[8] The relationship between these *deva*s and Caṇḍikā also contributes to the construction of the *deva* character type. In all of their interactions with Caṇḍikā the *deva*s are extraordinarily polite and respectful, and in several passages praise her in long *stotra*s.[9]

Many of the *deva*s, including Indra and the *deva*s of whom he is chief, have few characteristics and little textual prominence. The characters of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā are more textually prominent, with more extensive descriptions,[10] and more frequent

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[5] DM 2.3.
[6] DM 10.25.
[7] DM 3. 41 and 4.27-28, respectively.
[8] DM 5.1-4, 5.46-53, and 5.59-62.
[9] See, for example, DM 4.2-26, 5.7-36, and 11.2-34.
[10] See, for example, DM 1.72, 8.21, and 8.23.

interactions with Caṇḍikā.[11] As a type, then, the *deva*s are clearly subordinate to Caṇḍikā and the *devī*s, less textually prominent, and relate to Caṇḍikā in ways that highlight their own inferiority.[12] The text thus uses the character type of the *deva*s to indicate the *mahādevī*'s pre-eminence in the universe by indicating her superiority even over those who are generally held to be the highest authorities in the cosmos.

Character Types: The Goddesses

The *devī*s consist of a number of subdivided and occasionally overlapping character types, including the *mahādevī*, the *śakti*s, the *mātṛ*s, and Kālī. While all of these types are *devī*s, their respective labels, textual prominences, character traits, and relationships with the *mahādevī* indicate separate character types. Classifying the *devī*s by means of separate subtypes follows the example of Bharata, as discussed previously. This section discusses the first three groups, beginning with the *mahādevī*; Kālī is discussed separately, as the construction of her character type requires a consideration of the *asur*ic figures as well. David Kinsley notes that there are two different approaches to the concept of the *mahādevī* within Hindu traditions more generally: the first approach elevates a particular *devī*, previously seen as a discrete being, to the level of *mahādevī* and subsumes all other *devī*s into her. The second posits the existence of a *mahādevī*, and then considers all other *devī*s to be partial manifestations of that one transcendent *devī*.[13] The figure of Caṇḍikā in the *Devī Māhātmya* is clearly a representation of this latter type. Conceptions of the *mahādevī*

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[11] See, for example, DM 1.54-67, 8.21, and 8.32-37.

[12] Coburn notes that while it is possible to interpret Caṇḍikā's emergence from the *deva*s as a sign that she is in fact subordinate to them, the reverse is also possible. Indeed, every *devī* and *Devī Māhātmya* scholar claims that the text represents the *mahādevī* as the supreme being and as superior to the *deva*s. Thomas B. Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, eds. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 36.

[13] David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997[1986], 132.

usually posit her to be a powerful, creative, and active divine being who is both transcendent and immanent and who responds to the needs of her devotees. The *mahādevī* is thus a salvific figure,[14] whose presence as a warrior defeating *asura*s and restoring cosmic order places her firmly within the general pattern of Hindu myths.[15] Kinsley notes that the *mahādevī* is almost always considered to possess both benign and terrible forms;[16] this duality is also present among Hindu *devī*s as a larger character type, as the *devī*s are generally either nurturing and maternal, or terrifyingly violent. Such ambiguity is common both to *devī*s and to certain *deva*s, such as Śiva, within Hindu narrative literature. While the *mahādevī* in Hindu traditions more broadly would be impossible to discuss thoroughly, as she would necessarily encompass all aspects of the cosmos, the character of Caṇḍikā can be described by looking to those traits and behaviours highlighted by the *Devī Māhātmya* itself. Following the methods of Mieke Bal, as discussed in earlier chapters, the repetition of certain characteristics associated with Caṇḍikā indicates their importance to this particular textual representation of the theological idea of the *mahādevī*.[17]

In the *Devī Māhātmya*, the *mahādevī* is both benevolent and malevolent: she grants boons to both her *deva* and human devotees,[18] yet she also slaughters *asura*s with brutal and bloody violence. In the first episode of the text, in which Caṇḍikā dwells within Viṣṇu as *yoganīdra*, or yogic sleep, she possesses no other characteristics aside from this

[14] Thomas B. Coburn, "Consort of None, Śakti of All: The Vision of the *Devi-Mahatmya*," in *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India,* eds. John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), 159. See also David Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess in the Devī-māhātmya," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46, no. 4 (1978): 489.
[15] Hillary P. Rodrigues, "Asuras and Daityas," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 473.
[16] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 139.
[17] This discussion of Caṇḍikā is based primarily on textual references other than those found in the *stotra*s; while that material is relevant to the theology of the text, they do not necessarily describe Caṇḍikā but instead indicate the *deva*s' conceptions of Caṇḍikā.
[18] DM 11.35 and 13.10-11.

designation and is described only through Brahmā's *stotra*, which honours her as the supreme reality. In the second episode, she is described as having an extremely beautiful female figure; her beauty is repeatedly highlighted throughout the text, indicating a trait important to her character.[19] This episode also posits her as violent and destructive, intoxicated and angry with reddened eyes, and playful in battle; this last suggests the Hindu concept of *līlā*, or divine play.[20] She is mounted upon a lion, and wears or carries a variety of ornaments and weapons, given to her by the *deva*s. In the third episode she is again described as beautiful and she is again posited as violent, although her destructive behaviour is less graphic and brutal than in the second episode, possibly because Kālī and the *śakti*s act in vicious ways for her. Caṇḍikā's behaviour is significantly less terrible and more calm in the third episode; she speaks gently with a melodious voice;[21] she is respectful to the *asura*s, even when she is about to kill them;[22] and while she is periodically described as angry, her overall demeanour is more tranquil than is her depiction in the second subnarrative.[23] She is also posited as self-assured: her discussion with the messengers sent by Śumbha and Niśumbha indicates supreme confidence in her power and abilities, and this confidence is sufficiently visible in her demeanour that the *asura*s describe her as haughty.[24] She is mounted again upon a lion, and while the *deva*s do not again explicitly give her weapons and ornaments, as they did in the second episode, the reader is meant to understand that these weapons and ornaments are still carried or worn by

[19] DM 2.12; see also 5.42-53.
[20] This is a Hindu theological concept associated most closely with Kṛṣṇa, and refers to the idea that the supreme deity 'plays' in the world, often spontaneously. See David Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000[1975]), 73-78.
[21] DM 5.66.
[22] See especially DM 10.5.
[23] She becomes angry in the seventh book, immediately prior to Kālī's emergence, and is described as "enraged" in DM 9.26, 9.29, and 10.10.
[24] DM 5.66-76; DM 5.71.

her in the third episode. Overall, Caṇḍikā's character type is both benevolent and violent, angry and calm, and beautiful with frightening aspects to her appearance, including a face once blackened and eyes occasionally reddened in anger.[25] These opposing qualities serve to highlight her position as the *mahādevī*, since the *mahādevī* necessarily includes all possible aspects of a *devī*, particularly those that are commonly understood to be in opposition to one another. Caṇḍikā is primarily a warrior-figure in this text, although she does grant boons, and her slaughter of the *asura*s is posited as ultimately benevolent, as without the purification of her violence they would not pass on to heaven.[26] The idea of violence as ultimately benevolent may have implications for Kālī's figure in later textual traditions, in which she is posited as the salvific *mahādevī* herself; this is discussed in greater detail subsequently. Caṇḍikā's benevolence is otherwise unique to her figure in the text, as no other character is posited as compassionate or generous. Caṇḍikā's *śakti*, Śivadūtī, is unique as well: no other *devī* emits a *śakti*. Her lion mount, mentioned in both episodes, is important to her physical depiction, as are the variety of weapons she uses.[27]

Mieke Bal's concept of semantic axes, along which certain characteristics can be placed to facilitate analysis, is a useful tool in the construction of character types. It is, however, difficult to place Caṇḍikā firmly on any semantic axis, as she is meant to incorporate all possible qualities. However, a few positions are clear from those qualities frequently repeated in the *Devī Māhātmya*. First, Caṇḍikā is violent rather than peaceful, although this violence is tempered by her compassion. She is beautiful rather than ugly, and generous rather than selfish. Her character alternates between angry and calm; anger is

[25] DM 3.33 and 7.4.
[26] DM 4.18.
[27] She carries a trident, a discus, a conch, a spear, a bow with arrows, a thunderbolt, a bell, a staff, a noose, a sword and shield, unbreakable armour, and various other weapons. DM 2.19-30.

associated with her behaviour in battle while tranquility is connected with her speeches and her treatment of her devotees, both *deva* and human. Finally, she is self-assured rather than insecure, although not arrogant. She is also the most textually prominent character in the narrative. One last point about Caṇḍikā's character must be made: in each episode, her entrance into the narrative is through the body or bodies of other divine beings. In the first episode, she emerges from Viṣṇu;[28] in the second, from the bodies of the *deva*s;[29] and in the third episode, from the body of Pārvatī.[30] This parallels the entrance of the *devī*s in the text more generally, since all of the *devī*s, excluding Pārvatī, emerge from the body of another being. Each episode enlarges Caṇḍikā's position as the *mahādevī*: in the first subnarrative, she merely removes herself from Viṣṇu so that he may awaken and fight Madhu and Kaiṭabha, while in the second she herself takes physical form and slaughters Mahiṣāsura and his army. In the final episode, her position as a being who incorporates all other *devī*s into herself is made highly visible when she absorbs Kālī, Śivadūtī, and the *mātṛ*s back into her body.[31] The all-encompassing nature of the *mahādevī* as the personified supreme reality is thus made increasingly clear to the reader throughout the narrative, a clear textual device meant to convey the theological objectives of the text. For the purposes of this project, Caṇḍikā's character is particularly important, as it is the relationship between Caṇḍikā and Kālī that is of primary importance to the construction of Kālī's character type in the *Devī Māhātmya*.

The *śakti*s are the second type of *devī* in the *Devī Māhātmya*, and this group comprises both Śivadūtī and the *mātṛ*s, as all eight of these figures are explicitly labelled as

[28] DM 1.69.
[29] DM 2.9-10.
[30] DM 5.38-39.
[31] DM 10.3-4.

*śakti*s and come forth as the *śakti*s of six different characters. This type is clearly distinct from the type of the *mahādevī*, as the *śakti*s are labelled differently, express a narrower range of character traits, and appear only in the third episode. The *śakti*s, as a type, are best understood as comprising two related subtypes, one of which is expressed by the figure of Śivadūtī and the second of which is composed of the *mātṛ*s, who are the *śakti*s that emerge from the *deva*s. As a whole, the *śakti*s are violent, skilled in battle, and substantially more powerful than are the *asura*s. While seven of the eight *śakti*s come forth from the bodies of *deva*s, they are not understood to be the partners of these *deva*s; as Thomas Coburn notes, the language in the *Devī Māhātmya* does not posit these *śakti*s to be the *deva*s' consorts.[32] The term *śakti* can be literally translated as 'power' and, in a singular and universal sense, is equated with Caṇḍikā. However, in the plural sense used here, the phenomenon of a *śakti* should be understood "as something that each deity *has*."[33] Moreover, it is clear that *śakti*s do not emerge only from masculine figures, since Śivadūtī is the *śakti* of Caṇḍikā herself. There are, however, significant differences between Śivadūtī and the *mātṛ*s as represented in the text. These differences are found primarily in the deities from whom they emerge, as well as in their physical descriptions and respective textual prominences.

Following Bharata and Bhānudatta's examples, these differences indicate separate character subtypes within the larger group of the *śakti*s. Bhānudatta discusses character types in the *Rasamañjarī*, a treatise on character and *rasa* probably composed near the beginning of the sixteenth century.[34] The text is divided into two sections, each describing either the leading female or male character, or *nāyikā* and *nāyaka*. In the first section

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[32] Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," 38.
[33] Ibid.; italics in original.
[34] Bhānudatta, "Bouquet of Rasa," in *"Bouquet of Rasa" & "River of Rasa,"* trans. Sheldon Pollock. The Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Bhānudatta identifies new subtypes of leading female characters, based upon the earlier work of Bharata and other aesthetic theorists. Each subcategory is described with reference to physical characteristics, personal traits, relations with other characters, and behaviours. From these categorisations, based on relationships and personal traits, a character type is constructed. As Sheldon Pollock notes, Bhānudatta's extensive influence on Indian literary traditions was not due to innovative ideas, but instead to his abilities to summarise what was at his time a thousand-year-long aesthetic tradition.[35] Bhānudatta's obsessive detail in determining character types is thus indicative of patterns in Indian literary thought, and his approach to character resonates with this project's analysis of the characters in the *Devī Māhātmya*.

Śivadūtī, Caṇḍikā's *śakti*, enters the text immediately after the emergence of the seven *mātṛ*s. She is "gruesome," "very frightening," and yelps "like a hundred jackals."[36] Her behaviour in battle consists primarily of devouring the *asura*s,[37] and her laughter is so terrible that it shatters the *asura* soldiers. Once they have fallen to the ground, broken, she eats them.[38] She also cackles inauspiciously.[39] Her most visible moment in the text occurs when she speaks imperiously to Śiva, ordering him to take her message to Śumbha and Niśumbha.[40] This message is quite different in tone from the previous speeches of Caṇḍikā to the *asura*s, which were predominantly polite. Śivadūtī calls the *asura*s arrogant, demands they return the heavenly offices to the *deva*s and return to the netherworlds, and tells them that if they still want to fight, her jackals will eat their flesh. This speech-act is so

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[35] Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in *"Bouquet of Rasa" & "River of Rasa,"* trans. Sheldon Pollock. The Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: New York University Press, 2009), xix-xx.
[36] DM 8.22.
[37] DM 9.35 and 9.39.
[38] DM 8.37.
[39] DM 9.21.
[40] DM 8.23-26.

integral to her character that it lends itself to her name: Śivadūtī means 'she who has Śiva as a messenger.'[41] Of all of the *śakti*s, Śivadūtī has the least complete physical description, she is the only *śakti* to come forth from a *devī*, and she is the only *devī*, aside from Caṇḍikā, to speak with a *deva*. None of the other *śakti*s speaks at all, and this speech thus increases Śivadūtī's textual prominence in comparison to the other *śakti*s. While it is possible that the text does implicitly conflate Śivadūtī with the *mātṛ*s, as Coburn argues,[42] there is no explicit designation of Śivadūtī as a *mātṛ*. Furthermore, she is usually referenced in verses that also include Kālī and Caṇḍikā's lion,[43] rather than with the *mātṛ*s, whereas the *mātṛ*s are always textually positioned together. Śivadūtī's lack of physical description as compared to the *mātṛ*s, along with her position as Caṇḍikā's *śakti*, her speech-act, and her textual prominence indicate that Śivadūtī is a separate character subtype than are the *mātṛ*s. As a subtype, Śivadūtī is violent, although not so brutally violent as are Caṇḍikā, Kālī, and the *mātṛ*s, and unlike Caṇḍikā Śivadūtī does not have a beautiful form. While her physical form is not explicitly described, her 'frightening' and 'gruesome' descriptors indicate that she is not beautiful in the way that Caṇḍikā is beautiful. On these semantic axes Śivadūtī is not significantly different from most of the other minor *devī*s, although it is possible that the *mātṛ*s are meant to be pleasing in form. Rather, it is Śivadūtī's status as a *śakti* that separates her from Kālī, and Śivadūtī's speech-act, textual prominence, and positioning that indicate her separate subtype from the *mātṛ*s.

The *mātṛ*s represent the second subtype of the *śakti devī* character type. They emerge from five different *deva*s: Brahmā, Śiva, Skanda, Viṣṇu, and Indra. Each has the form, the ornaments, and often the mount of the particular *deva* from whom she emerges.

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[41] DM 8.27.
[42] Coburn, "Devī: The Great Goddess," 38-39.
[43] DM 9.19-21, 9.35, and 9.39.

One *śakti* from each of Brahmā, Śiva, Skanda, and Indra emerges: Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, and Aindrī, respectively. Three *śakti*s emerge from Viṣṇu, one taking Viṣṇu's own form and two taking forms based on different *avatāra*s: Vaiṣṇavī is mounted upon Garuḍa and carries a conch, discus, club, bow, and sword; Vārāhī takes the shape of a sow, carrying a discus and a sword; and Nārasiṃhī takes the form of a female version of Viṣṇu's man-lion form.[44] Each *mātṛ* is given one verse for her description, and all seven are violent, destructive, and skilled in battle. Some are more brutal than others: while Brahmāṇī simply quenches the bravery of the *asura*s with her waterpot, Aindrī's thunderbolt tears open the chests of the *asura*s so violently that their blood runs in torrents on the ground.[45] Both of the *mātṛ*s with animal-like forms, Vārāhī and Nārasiṃhī, use parts of their bodies in battle: Vārāhī rips open the *asura*s with her snout, while Nārasiṃhī tears into them with her claws and devours them.[46] The ferocity of these characters sends many *asura*s fleeing, and brings forth the *asura* Raktabīja, whose strength and regenerative abilities seem a match for the *mātṛ*s. He strikes each of them with his club,[47] and also strikes Caṇḍikā;[48] he is the only figure in the text who succeeds at assaulting a *devī*. Once he is killed, the *mātṛ*s become drunk on his blood and begin to dance.[49] It is not explicitly stated that the *mātṛ*s actually drink Raktabīja's blood, but it is perhaps implied. Hillary Rodrigues argues that the *mātṛ*s do not drink Raktabīja's blood but are still intoxicated by the blood drunk by Kālī. This, according to Rodrigues, indicates the interconnectedness of all of the *devī*s as parts of the

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[44] DM 8.11-20. See 8.35 for the mention of Vārāhī's weapon. While Viṣṇu's *avatāra*s are not explicitly referenced in this text, the presence of Vārāhī and Nārasiṃhī indicate the presence of at least Viṣṇu's boar and man-lion *avatāra*s in the cultural world informing this text's conceptions of divine characters.
[45] DM 8.32 and 8.34.
[46] DM 8.35-36.
[47] DM 8.49.
[48] DM 8.56.
[49] DM 8.62.

mahādevī, as well as their affinity for blood more generally.[50] In either case, the *mātṛ*s are explicitly associated with blood-drinking and intoxication, both in the *Devī Māhātmya* and in Hindu narrative literature more broadly. Each *mātṛ* in the *Devī Māhātmya* is given approximately the same textual prominence as the others; in the eighth book all seven are explicitly described in battle at least once, Vaiṣṇavī, Kaumārī, Vārāhī, and Māheśvarī are mentioned twice, and Aindrī is mentioned three times.[51] The ninth book mentions Kaumārī, Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Vārāhī, Vaiṣṇavī, and Aindrī independently.[52] Each mention is brief and does not use much textual space. The *mātṛ*s are frequently mentioned as a group, and are specifically labelled as both the *mātṛ*s and the *mātṛgaṇa*, or the band of mothers.[53] None speaks, although Nārasiṃhī fills the sky with her snorts,[54] and as individuals they are mentioned less frequently than is Śivadūtī. Along with Śivadūtī and Kālī, they return to the body of Caṇḍikā at the beginning of the tenth book. As a character subtype, the *mātṛ*s are violent, although their violence is less brutal and is repeated less often than that of Caṇḍikā or Kālī. They exist only to fight the *asura*s for the sake of the *deva*s,[55] and individually they are determined only by their resemblance to a particular *deva* or *avatāra*. They are associated with intoxication and blood, and the two *mātṛ*s with animal-forms have an especially brutal nature. The *mātṛ*s are not explicitly described as beautiful or ugly, although since their forms are closely related to those of the *deva*s, who are generally

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[50] Hillary P. Rodrigues, "Durgā," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 539.
[51] DM 8.32-36, 8.41, and 8.46-48.
[52] DM 9.36-38.
[53] See, for example DM 8.38, 8.39, 8.44, and 8.49. For their label as the *mātṛgaṇa*, see Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devī-Māhātmya and a Study of Its Interpretation* (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 21.
[54] DM 8.36.
[55] DM 8.11.

considered to be beautiful, they are probably well-formed.[56] The *mātṛ*s, along with Śivadūtī, are not described as generous or selfish, angry or calm, or arrogant or insecure. Their subtype depends primarily on their group identity, their relationships to specific *deva*s, their limited textual prominence, their intoxication, and their association with blood. David Kinsley, who has studied *devī*s extensively, points to a number of literary sources that likely contributed to the cultural idea of the *mātṛ*s, and notes that these *devī*s are often viewed as extensions of the *mahādevī*.[57]

Before moving to a discussion of the *asura*s, it is worthwhile to mention briefly the character of Pārvatī, who does not fit into any of the aforementioned *devī* character subtypes. Pārvatī appears in only five verses: after the *deva*s lose their offices to Śumbha and Niśumbha and praise the *mahādevī* in hopes of her assistance, she bathes in the river Gaṅgā and asks the *deva*s whom they are praising.[58] Caṇḍikā comes forth from Pārvatī's body, answering that it is she who is praised.[59] Following this, Pārvatī becomes black, takes the name Kālikā, and leaves to make her home in the Himālaya mountains.[60] The text implies that previous to this emergence Pārvatī's body was golden, or *gaurī*.[61] Pārvatī does not appear in the text following this passage, and the purpose of her character in the text is unclear. Kinsley suggests that one of the cultural strands used in the development of this text is that of Śiva's consort, associated with mountain *devī*s, and uses the example of

[56] The *mātṛ*s take the forms of the *deva*s so precisely that Aindrī is described as having a thousand eyes like Indra, DM 8.20. In some variants of Indra myths, he is said to be covered in a thousand vaginas rather than eyes; while vaginas are necessarily associated with female characters, this variant does not seem to be present in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Wendy Doniger, "'Put a Bag over Her Head': Beheading Mythological Women," in *Off With Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, eds. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 25.
[57] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses,*151 and 157-158.
[58] DM 5.37-38. While Gaṅgā is often considered to be a *devī* in Hindu mythological texts, there is no reason to think that the *Devī Māhātmya* is referencing the personified *devī* here, rather than the sacred river. Gaṅgā is thus not considered as a *devī* character type in this text.
[59] DM 5.39.
[60] DM 5.41. The word used for black here is *kṛṣṇā*.
[61] DM 4.35.

Caṇḍikā's emergence from Pārvatī to provide evidence for this assertion.[62] Although Kālī and Pārvatī are identified quite closely in later Hindu textual and devotional traditions, there is no significant reason to suggest such a relationship based on this text. Thus, while Pārvatī is a *devī* in the *Devī Māhātmya*, this project does not consider her role to be adequately significant to require further analysis.

Character Types: The Monsters

The final character type described before moving to a discussion of Kālī is the type composed of the *asura* characters. The details of this type are particularly important for this project's larger discussion of Kālī, as Kālī's character is closely connected to the *asura*s. The *asura* characters in the *Devī Māhātmya* are organised differently depending upon the episode in which they appear. In the first episode only two *asura*s are present, a parallel to the presence of the two *deva*s, Brahmā and Viṣṇu. Both *asura*s, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, arise from "the dirt in Viṣṇu's ear."[63] These two *asura*s are "terrible," "of wicked soul, tremendously virile and valorous," red-eyed with anger, and intoxicated by their own strength.[64] In the second and third episodes, the *asura*s are present as a group, led either by Mahiṣāsura, in the second episode, or by Śumbha and Niśumbha, in the third. As a group, the *asura*s properly belong in the netherworlds, to which they return after their defeat by the *devī*s, and they frequently attempt to disrupt the organisation of the cosmos by taking the offices and authorities of the *deva*s. In this way the *asura*s promote chaos, as the natural and ordered condition of the universe requires that the *deva*s be in positions of authority in the heavens, with the *asura*s restricted to the netherworlds. In the *Devī Māhātmya* the

[62] Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess," 491.
[63] DM 1.50.
[64] DM 1.50, 1.71, 1.71, and 1.73, respectively. This intoxication is also referred to as a state of delusion caused by *mahāmāyā*, a form of the *mahādevī*.

*asura*s are organised into a military hierarchy, with many millions of troops under the command of generals, who are in turn commanded by the supreme leader or leaders. In the second episode, all of the generals fight Caṇḍikā at once; Mahiṣāsura is present but does not engage in battle until all of his generals are killed. In the third episode, Śumbha and Niśumbha send out their generals individually, and fight Caṇḍikā only once their armies have been devastated. The text also notes that Śumbha and Niśumbha have taken possession of all of the jewels, gems, elephants, and horses previously belonging to the *deva*s, along with their offices.[65]

The *asura*s in the *Devī Māhātmya* are frequently described as both mighty and brave. Madhu, Kaiṭabha, Mahiṣāsura, Cikṣura, and Muṇḍa are called "valorous,"[66] and Madhu and Kaiṭabha are also described as "virile."[67] It is acknowledged by the text that the *asura* troops are strong and powerful, as their magnificence, prowess, and valour are repeatedly highlighted and the text makes many references to 'great,' 'mighty' and 'brave' *asura*s.[68] Mahiṣāsura is extraordinarily powerful in battle: he crushes the earth, hurls mountains, thrashes the ocean, and tears apart clouds.[69] He appears in multiple forms, and succeeds in killing those troops created by Caṇḍikā's breath.[70] His generals are also quite powerful, as they succeed in striking Caṇḍikā's lion despite its prowess in battle,[71] although Caṇḍikā dispatches these generals quickly and easily. Raktabīja is also a remarkably powerful *asur*ic figure, as is evident through his assaults on each of the *devī*s except for

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[65] DM 5.46-52 and 5.59-62.
[66] See DM 1.71, 3.24, 3.10, and 7.21.
[67] DM 1.71.
[68] DM 8.6 and 8.32. See, for a remarkably clear example, DM 9.16.
[69] DM 3.24-26.
[70] DM 3.24 and 3.34 for the mountains; 3.29-39 for multiple forms, a common motif in this text (see, for example, Raktabīja and Niśumbha) and 2.51-53 for the creation of the *pramatha*s and 3.23 for Mahiṣāsura's destruction of them.
[71] See, for example, DM 3.6 and 3.14, and, for the lion's abilities in battle, 3.13-15.

Kālī and Śivadūtī. He is also the only *asura* whose abilities cause anxiety for the *deva*s.[72] Finally, Śumbha and Niśumbha are perhaps the most powerful and destructive *asura*s in the text, with Śumbha only slightly more powerful than his brother. Each fights Caṇḍikā, and these fights are given a large amount of textual space, particularly the fight between Caṇḍikā and Śumbha. The length of these battles indicates the prowess of the *asura*s: only immensely powerful *asura*s would be capable of fighting the *mahādevī* for such long periods of time. Niśumbha also displays remarkable regenerative properties, similar to those of Mahiṣāsura.[73]

The *asura*s are frequently described as arrogant or haughty, particularly about their strength and power. Their conceit is ultimately their downfall, as it is their misplaced pride in their own abilities that blind them to Caṇḍikā's nature as the ultimate divine reality and cause them to underestimate her. Śivadūtī refers to their "ill-begotten arrogance about [their] strength;"[74] the *deva*s call them as "haughty;"[75] and they are often described as 'puffed up with pride.'[76] This arrogance is considered to be an intoxicating force,[77] as the *asura*s are often described as drunk or intoxicated on both their pride and their rage. Madhu and Kaiṭabha are "[i]ntoxicated by their excessive might;" Mahiṣāsura is "puffed up and drunk with might and power;" and Śumbha's mind becomes "deranged" with anger.[78] This anger, along with its indicative red eyes, is a significant character trait for the *asura*s; this reddish quality is likely also connected to intoxication.[79] Reddened eyes are common for

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[72] DM 8.49, 8.51, and 8.56, respectively.
[73] DM 9.33
[74] DM 8.26.
[75] DM 5.36.
[76] See, for example, DM 8.29.
[77] See again the example of Madhu and Kaiṭabha, intoxicated by their deluded conception of their own strength.
[78] DM 1.73, 3.34, and 8.2.
[79] DM 3.33-36; Caṇḍikā's eyes are red both from anger and from drinking an intoxicating beverage.

asura characters: Madhu, Kaiṭabha, and Cikṣura are all explicitly described as having eyes that are reddened in anger.[80] Given the textual connection between anger and reddened eyes, it is logical to assume that the rest of the *asura*s also have reddish eyes, as all of them are repeatedly characterised as enraged. Wrathfulness is the most frequently cited trait of the *asura*s: the troops are described as "enraged" and "angry,"[81] while several individual *asura* characters are explicitly described as infuriated. Madhu and Kaiṭabha are enraged;[82] Mahiṣāsura is described as angry three separate times;[83] Cikṣura and Cāmara, both of whom are generals of Mahiṣāsura, are filled with anger;[84] and Śumbha and Niśumbha are exceptionally wrathful. Not only does the anger of Śumbha and Niśumbha drive them into "an unparalleled frenzy,"[85] Śumbha is described as enraged and furious in five separate verses, including one passage in which he is "deranged with anger."[86] Niśumbha is similarly described as "outraged," "blustering with outrage," and "trumpeting with rage,"[87] while Raktabīja is "filled with rage."[88] This anger is also textually connected to the mouths of the *asura*s, as in one verse the *asura* troops are described as "[a]ngry and biting their lips."[89] The *asura*s in the *Devī Māhātmya* are not physically described aside from Śumbha and Niśumbha's dark skin, indicated by their description as "two great thunderclouds,"[90] and the *asura*s' eyes; one *asura*, Dhūmralocana, is named after his eyes, which are

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[80] DM 1.71 and 3.7. The association between anger and reddish eyes is explicit in this text, as even Caṇḍikā is described as angry with reddened eyes. DM 3.33.
[81] DM 8.10 and 9.5, respectively.
[82] DM 1.71.
[83] DM 2.35, 3.24 and 3.27; "fumed in anger," "[i]n anger," and "inflated with anger," respectively.
[84] DM 3.7 and 3.12.
[85] DM 9.3.
[86] DM 6.2, 6.17, 8.2, 9.15, and 10.1. See DM 8.2 for the direct quotation.
[87] DM 9.2, 9.4, and 9.12.
[88] DM 8.49.
[89] DM 9.5.
[90] DM 9.7. In Chapter Two, the textual connection between dark skin and thunderclouds was made clear in the case of Kālī.

smoky.[91] The association between reddened eyes, dark bodies, and *asura*s also exists within the larger context of Hindu mythic narratives,[92] and *asura*s are also noted for their sunken bellies, reddened eyes, long tongues, and wide mouths, among other traits.[93] These physical traits are an important aspect of the *asur*ic character type; as Bharata notes, the physical form of a character is important for the audience's recognition of that character's identity. He claims that an actor playing a *deva* must have sound limbs, be neither too fat nor too thin, not be hump-backed, and have a good voice and a handsome face. Actors playing *rākṣasa*s, *dānava*s, or *daitya*s should be "hefty, tall, with a booming voice, red eyes and a frowning look."[94] This indicates that physical characteristics are used in Indian literary theory to determine the category into which a figure is placed, and that these physical traits exist as reference points within Sanskrit texts more generally.

The *asura*s in the text are also associated with loud noises: Mahiṣāsura roars, presumably in anger and frustration,[95] and Niśumbha explicitly links noise-making with anger, as he attacks Caṇḍikā while "[t]rumpeting with rage."[96] Śumbha's noise-making is described as a "lionesque roar."[97] Aside from these wordless noises, several of the *asura*s speak in the *Devī Māhātmya*. They primarily speak to one another or to Caṇḍikā, although on one occasion Madhu and Kaiṭabha speak condescendingly to Viṣṇu. In their dealings

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[91] Coburn translates *dhūmralocana* as 'eyes of smoke;' DM 6.2.
[92] N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon* (Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 111.
[93] Ibid., 112; these other traits include pointed ears, stiff hair, a thick nose and a copper-coloured face. These traits are also associated with *rākṣasa*s; as Frederick W. Bunce notes, *rākṣasa*s are often viewed as a subtype of *asura*s. "Rakshasas," in *An Encyclopedia of Hindu Deities, Demi-Gods, Godlings, Demons and Heroes: With a Special Focus on Iconographic Attributes*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd, 2000[1998]), 437. Margaret Stutley also notes the association between *rākṣasa*s, long tongues, and fiery eyes. "Rākṣasa(s), Rākṣasī(s)," in *Hindu Deities: A Mythological Dictionary with Illustrations* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2006), 106.
[94] Bharata, *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, 337. Rodrigues notes that the term *daitya* is often used interchangeably with *asura*. "Asuras and Daityas," 469.
[95] DM 3.34 and 3.36.
[96] DM 9.12.
[97] DM 9.24.

with one another the *asura*s display a hierarchy: when inferiors speak to superiors they are often obsequious, and when superiors speak to inferiors they are usually blunt and demanding. For example, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa flatter Śumbha when they speak to him,[98] and Śumbha is harsh and domineering when he speaks to his troops and generals.[99] Sugrīva, Dhūmralocana, and Śumbha all speak to Caṇḍikā, alternating between false obsequiousness and outright rudeness and hostility. Sugrīva begins his speech to Caṇḍikā with flattery and persuasion, particularly while reciting Śumbha's message to her, and abruptly switches to hostility and insults when Caṇḍikā gently refuses to accompany him back to Śumbha and Niśumbha.[100] Dhūmralocana is similarly insulting, as is Śumbha, who scolds Caṇḍikā for being "haughty" and "puffed up with misplaced pride in [her] own strength of arms."[101] The *asura*s also threaten Caṇḍikā with abduction, and there are several references to "dragging [Caṇḍikā] by the hair."[102] This threat evokes the famous scene in the *Mahābhārata*, in which Draupadī is violently dragged by her hair after being staked and lost by Yudhiṣṭhira in a game of dice. The *Mahābhārata* conceives of its primary characters as partial incarnations of either *deva*s or *asura*s, and the *asur*ic humans are described as the ones who assault Draupadī and provoke chaos in the human world. The *Devī Māhātmya*'s use of this trope evokes this textual reference, which strengthens the perception of the *asura*s as figures whose actions threaten the natural order of the world.

The *asur*ic character type is thus strong, valorous, angry, arrogant, disrespectful, and impolite; the *asura*s are remarkably powerful and destructive in battle; and they are associated with darkened bodies, reddened eyes, long tongues and wide mouths,

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[98] DM 5.43-53.
[99] DM 6.2-4, 6.18-20, and 8.3-5.
[100] DM 5.57-65.
[101] DM 6.6-7 and 10.2. Sugrīva also calls her haughty, DM 5.71.
[102] DM 6.3. See also DM 5.74, 6.7, and 6.18-20.

intoxication, and loud noises. On the semantic axes previously discussed with respect to Caṇḍikā's character type, the *asura*s are posited as quite violent, extremely angry, arrogant, and selfish. The *asura*s are viewed as a group throughout most Hindu textual traditions, which generally describe their collective nature since at least the time of the later *Ṛg Veda* hymns.[103] This character type is particularly important for understanding Kālī's portrayal in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as her similarities to these characters provide evidence to support the claim that she represents the *asur*ic *devī* character type.

Character Types: A Brief Summary

While each larger character category – *deva*s, *devī*s, and *asura*s – presents one or more clear character types through their individual descriptions, these types can also be considered in comparison to one another by using Bal's concept of semantic axes, which serves to highlight further which traits are most fundamental for each type. Caṇḍikā is the most violent character type described thus far; the *mātṛ*s, *asura*s, and Śivadūtī are also on the violent end of the violent/peaceful axis, in order of decreasing intensity. The *deva*s are positioned in the middle of this axis; while none begins a battle, Viṣṇu and Indra, along with the rest of the *deva*s of the first subtype, do battle the *asura*s in the first and second episodes. However, their ultimate failures indicate that they are not as violent or as skilled in battle as are the other character groups. The *asura*s are extremely angry, while the *deva*s present calmness and order; the *mahādevī* is present at both poles of this axis, depending upon her presence as a warrior or as a salvific and benevolent protector and granter of boons. While Caṇḍikā is supremely self-confident, the *asura*s are intensely arrogant, and where Caṇḍikā is generous the *asura*s are greedy and selfish. Caṇḍikā is also placed firmly

[103] Rodrigues, "Asuras and Daityas," 470. Rodrigues also notes that by the time of the composition of the Brāhmaṇas the word '*asura*' refers to a class of beings eternally in conflict with the *deva*s, 471.

at the beautiful extreme of the beautiful/ugly semantic axis; the *deva*s and the *mātṛ*s are also placed towards that pole, although their pleasing forms are not as intensely beautiful as Caṇḍikā's body. Both Śivadūtī and the *asura*s exist towards the other end of this axis, although they are not placed at the extreme pole since neither is explicitly described as ugly. While these comparisons are brief, they serve to suggest some similarities and differences between and among the character types, and they present a method for determining the character type of Kālī, which is best constructed within the context of the other characters in the text.

Before moving to the next sections, in which Kālī is considered in context with these character types, it is worthwhile to note the presence of one further character type in the *Devī Māhātmya*: the humans. The speaker in the largest frame narrative is Mārkaṇḍeya, a *ṛṣi* or sage, and the three other human characters are Suratha, a king, Samādhi, a merchant, and Medhas, a sage.[104] Humans are also referenced twice within the narrative related by Medhas. First, when Mahiṣāsura takes over their offices in the second episode, the *deva*s are described as "wander[ing] the earth like (mere) mortals,"[105] clearly indicating that humans are subordinate to *deva*s in both power and authority. Second, after Mahiṣāsura's defeat the *deva*s ask that humans also be recipients of the boon they request from Caṇḍikā:

> "And whatever mortal praises you with hymns, O one whose face is without blemish,
> May you, O Ambikā, who are resorted to by us, the grantress of everything,
> Be concerned with his growth through wealth, wife, success, (etc.) by means of riches, prosperity, and power."[106]

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[104] It is worth noting that the human characters represent only males from the twice-born castes.
[105] DM 2.6. Parentheses are original to Coburn's translation.
[106] DM 4.31-32. Parentheses are original to Coburn's translation.

The *deva*s thus posit themselves as protectors of humans, and the humans are therefore similarly capable of calling upon Caṇḍikā in times of need. This message is reinforced at the end of the *māhātmya*, where Suratha and Samādhi receive boons from Caṇḍikā.

Ambiguity among the Gods, the Goddesses, & the Monsters

The similarities shared by the *devī*s and the *asura*s on several of the semantic axes previously discussed indicate the presence of ambiguities in the *Devī Māhātmya*'s depiction of both groups. Rodrigues notes that in the earliest Vedic literature there were substantial ambiguities concerning the nature of *deva*s and *asura*s, with the term *asura* often designating a leader rather than an enemy of the *deva*s.[107] While the term eventually crystallised into the meaning it holds in this text, indicating the enemies of the *deva*s, Rodrigues also notes that some of these ambiguities remain present in the natures of several divine figures, both masculine and feminine, within the larger Hindu traditions. He claims that the theological objective in the *Devī Māhātmya* requires an integration of *dev*ic and *asur*ic qualities, and presents Kālī, in her later form as the absolute divinity, as an example of a deity associated with death, cremation grounds, and darkness, rendering her difficult to distinguish from the *asura*s or the *rākṣasa*s as conceived of in Hindu literature more broadly.[108]

Kālī's fundamental characteristics, as discussed in Chapter Two, along with her similarities to and relationships with the *devī*s and *asura*s, discussed subsequently, provide the details of Kālī's character type. It is worth noting here that the text does explicitly label Kālī as a *devī*, indicating that this classification is important to the construction of her character. During her battle with Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, the text includes this verse:

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[107] Rodrigues, "Asuras and Daityas," 469.
[108] Ibid., 475.

> Mounting her great lion, the Goddess ran at Caṇḍa,
> And having seized him by the hair, she cut off his head with her sword.[109]

While at first glance this passage seems to be describing Caṇḍikā, particularly since this *devī* mounts Caṇḍikā's lion, Kālī is certainly the *devī* in this verse. Kālī's vanquishing of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa is important to her figure throughout Hindu traditions more generally, and is not contested or controversial.[110] Furthermore, in the tenth book all of the *devī*s return to the body of Caṇḍikā, leaving her alone to fight Śumbha; Kālī is necessarily included in this grouping, since Caṇḍikā is unaccompanied after the withdrawal of the *devī*s back into her form.[111] The classification of Kālī as a *devī* is important, particularly in context with the subsequent section in which Kālī is examined in context with the *asura*s, with whom she shares a number of similarities.

Kālī's features are strongly *asur*ic, both textually and culturally, leading to the conclusion that she is the textual representation of an *asur*ic *devī* character type. This proposal has parallels within current scholarship on both *asura*s and the *mahādevī*, as well as within the *devī*-oriented traditions themselves. In the *Devī Māhātmya*, Kālī, as this type of *devī*, also expresses the *mahāsur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*. Within the theological concept of the *mahādevī* is the necessary inclusion of an *asur*ic aspect, which, in order to maintain the text's theological objective of including all lesser *devī*s within one great *devī*, must be expressed through the figure of a *devī*. Because of her extreme violence, her gruesome appearance and behaviour, and her textual connections to wrathfulness, Kālī best

[109] DM 7.19. The Sanskrit uses the term *devī*.
[110] See, for example, Coburn's brisk assessment of Kālī as the destroyer of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa in *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 109; as well as Rodrigues, "Durgā," 539; and Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 118.
[111] DM 10.4. The Sanskrit uses the term *devī*.

represents this *asur*ic aspect. This argument is supported through an examination of Kālī's relationships with the *mahādevī*, the *śakti*s, and the *asura*s.

Ambiguity is also apparent in the theological concept of the *mahādevī*, who often manifests in violent and terrible forms. These manifestations are viewed as integral and important parts of her figure. As Kinsley notes, most of the texts celebrating the *mahādevī* assert the importance of these forms, which are considered to be both terrible and fierce, and are "associated with war, blood, destruction, death, and hunger."[112] The *mahādevī* is also associated with the concept of *māyā*, or illusion, in both the *Devī Māhātmya* and in Sanskrit narratives more generally. This concept is discussed in greater detail subsequently. While in general these texts do not explicitly state the connection between these violent manifestations and the *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*, the thematic connections between *asur*ic figures and these terrible *devī*s suggest the possibility that such *devī*s can easily express the *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*, provided that sufficient textual context is present. Moreover, as both Rodrigues and the *Devī Māhātmya* explicitly state, the *mahādevī* in this text requires an *asur*ic aspect or *asur*ic qualities in order to promote sufficiently the text's theological objective. It is Kālī's close relationship with Caṇḍikā that indicates Kālī's expression of the *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*, and thus ultimately of the *mahāsurī*.

<u>The Relationship Between Kālī & Caṇḍikā</u>

Kālī's relationship with Caṇḍikā provides the most important information concerning Kālī's character type. Kālī's character traits, taken as a whole, indicate that she is most similar to Caṇḍikā. This is not simply because as the *mahādevī* Caṇḍikā necessarily

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[112] Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses*, 144.

represents all facets of reality, including those displayed by Kālī's character, but instead because of their similarities, as explicitly described in the *Devī Māhātmya*, and their implied close relationship. While the theological implications of the *mahādevī* require that all other *devī*s be viewed as manifestations of one great *devī*, Kālī in particular is posited as especially close to Caṇḍikā in this text, supporting this thesis' claim that the *Devī Māhātmya* posits Kālī as an important and specific aspect of the *mahādevī*.

Both Kālī and Caṇḍikā emerge from the face of an angered divine being. Whereas Caṇḍikā emerges from the angry faces of Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā, while Kālī emerges from Caṇḍikā's own face, the fundamental similarity is important both for their individual figures and for their relationship. Both enter the text once a character is enraged by an event that should not occur in an ordered and harmonious world: the *asura*s should not be in positions of authority and *devī*s should not be threatened with abduction and forced marriage. The existences of Caṇḍikā and Kālī in this text are thus intimately linked to a sense of injustice, and the two characters are meant, through their abilities in battle, to right the particular wrong that gave rise to their entrance. No other character in the text is born from or mediated through anger; the *śakti*s emerge in order to assist Caṇḍikā, but are not themselves associated with anger either in origin or in characteristics. Kālī's relationship to Caṇḍikā is not explicitly labelled in the text; while Śivadūtī is Caṇḍikā's *śakti*, Kālī is clearly something else, despite the emergence of both characters from Caṇḍikā's body. More importantly, Kālī is identified as the embodiment of Caṇḍikā's wrath, a connection that resonates within Kālī's larger literary context, as she is repeatedly described as embodying the anger of a particular *devī*, usually Pārvatī.[113]

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[113] Ibid., 118.

Kālī and Caṇḍikā are also similar in more concrete details. They are the most skilled warriors in the text, and their actions in battle occupy significantly more textual space than those of the other *devī*s. They are both violent, and as previously noted with respect to Caṇḍikā, violent acts carried out by the *mahādevī* – and thus, perhaps, any *devī* – are understood to be salvific for the recipients; thus the *asura*s killed by Caṇḍikā are sent to heaven by this purification.[114] This concept may apply to Kālī as well, and perhaps influences those later traditions in which she is viewed as the ultimate divine and salvific presence in the cosmos. Both Caṇḍikā and Kālī carry several weapons, and both wear garments and adornments. While Caṇḍikā is described more extensively than is Kālī, this is appropriate given Caṇḍikā's identity as the *mahādevī* and Kālī's identity as a manifestation of her. Both speak to other characters and both make loud noises. Caṇḍikā's speech to Kālī further indicates their close relationship: the only *devī* to whom Caṇḍikā speaks is Kālī, and Kālī is the only figure to receive an epithet from the *mahādevī*. Textual positioning also reinforces their closeness, as the two are frequently referenced together, often with Caṇḍikā's lion. On one occasion these three figures are the only explicit targets of Niśumbha's arrows, [115] indicating their proximity to one another and also suggesting a closer relationship between Caṇḍikā and Kālī than that portrayed between Caṇḍikā and the *mātṛ*s. Kālī, Caṇḍikā, and Śivadūtī all laugh horribly during battle, and are the only characters to do so.[116]

The most significant difference between Kālī and Caṇḍikā is their physical form. While Kālī is ugly, Caṇḍikā's body, particularly in the third episode, is described as extremely beautiful. However, it is also significant that both *devī*s to emerge from

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[114] DM 4.18.
[115] DM 9.27.
[116] See DM 2.31 and 8.32 for Caṇḍikā's laughter, 7.22 for Kālī's laughter, and 8.37 for Śivadūtī's laughter.

Caṇḍikā's beautiful form, Kālī and Śivadūtī, are themselves gruesome and frightening. Śivadūtī's position as Caṇḍikā's *śakti* means that her gruesomeness necessarily describes a part or aspect of Caṇḍikā's character in the narrative. This suggests that Caṇḍikā is, in some fundamental way, both gruesome and frightening, and thus this physical difference between Kālī and Caṇḍikā is perhaps less significant than is immediately apparent. The character of Śivadūtī supports the close relationship between Caṇḍikā and Kālī: Kālī and Śivadūtī are quite similar, and so Śivadūtī's position as Caṇḍikā's *śakti* suggests that Kālī's similarities to Śivadūtī indicate a similarity to a fundamental part of Caṇḍikā herself. Kālī also shares commonalities with Caṇḍikā's lion, as both are the only characters to engage explicitly in blood-drinking, both roar in a similar fashion, both use parts of their bodies as weapons, and both are textually positioned as close to one another.[117] Kālī is also the only character other than Caṇḍikā to ride the lion.

The close relationship between Caṇḍikā and Kālī serves to support the claim that Kālī is fundamentally most similar to the *mahādevī*, despite their clear differences. Kinsley argues that Kālī is the *mahādevī*'s "most important companion-form,"[118] and this is evident not only in their closeness but also in the length of time Kālī fights alongside Caṇḍikā as compared to the other *devī*s, who emerge only after the seventh book. These similarities, along with Kālī's explicit status as a *devī*, serve to construct Kālī's character type in several ways. First, Kālī's vicious and violent nature is reinforced, since Caṇḍikā is the only character to approach Kālī's degree of destructiveness in battle. Second, Kālī's connections to anger are strengthened; by placing her emergence in context with the emergence of Caṇḍikā it becomes clear that Kālī enters the narrative in response to the anger provoked by

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[117] See DM 9.19 for an example of the lion's roar, and see DM 6.14 for the lion's blood-drinking.
[118] Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess," 493.

an inappropriate action. This has implications for Kālī's later textual depictions as a figure who upholds *dharma* and the cosmic order.[119] Finally, these similarities make it evident that, even without the theological claim that the *mahādevī* incorporates all *devī*s, Kālī is a particularly important and close aspect of Caṇḍikā, and that their relationship is important to Kālī's portrayal in this text.

Kālī and the Goddesses: A Closer Look at the *mātṛ*s & Śivadūtī

Kālī's character type is constructed partially through her connections with the other *devī*s present in the text. As Kālī is herself a *devī*, her similarities to and differences from these characters provide information about both her character and her position in the text. This section examines Kālī in context with the *śakti*s; despite a few superficial similarities, Kālī is posited by the *Devī Māhātmya* to be quite different from the *mātṛ*s. Her similarities to Śivadūtī are much more extensive, yet, as was previously argued, these similarities serve primarily to strengthen Kālī's relationship with Caṇḍikā.

Kālī and the *mātṛ*s share only a few commonalities, predominantly related to their behaviour in battle and to their weapons and adornments. All of the *mātṛ*s are violent in battle, although not all of them display the same intensity of brutality that Kālī consistently presents. Only Nārasiṃhī eats *asura*s, and only Nārasiṃhī and Vārāhī use their bodies as weapons. The forms of Nārasiṃhī and Vārāhī, a lion-woman and a sow, respectively, may suggest a connection between eating one's enemies and an animal-like ferocity, but this is not explicitly stated. Two of the *mātṛ*s, namely Brahmāṇī and Māheśvarī, wear ornaments, as does Kālī, and all of the *mātṛ*s excluding Nārasiṃhī carry weapons. The only *mātṛ* to

[119] See, for example, Patricia Dold's claim that the *purāṇ*ic Kālī supports the orthodox order rather than upsetting it. "Kālī the Terrific and Her Tests: The Śākta Devotionalism of the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, eds. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 42.

carry as many weapons as Kālī, however, is Vaiṣṇavī; both *devī*s carry four separate weapons. Kālī shares only two weapons in common with the *mātṛ*s: she, Vārāhī, and Vaiṣṇavī all carry swords, and she and Kaumārī both carry spears. None of the *mātṛ*s carries a noose or a staff, and the skull atop Kālī's staff is unique to her. In similar fashion to Śivadūtī, Nārasiṃhī, and Vārāhī, Kālī is mountless, although on one occasion she does ride Caṇḍikā's lion mount. None of the *mātṛ*s makes noise, except for Nārasiṃhī, who snorts. As previously stated, only Kālī is explicitly described as drinking blood, although it is possible that the *mātṛ*s drink the blood of Raktabīja, as they are described as intoxicated on it. The similarities between Kālī and the *mātṛ*s are, however, relatively superficial, and a consideration of Kālī's three fundamental character traits, extreme and brutal violence, gruesomeness, and anger indicates that Kālī has little in common with this character type. While the *mātṛ*s are ferocious, their violence is not described to the extent that Kālī's is, and none is described in ways that suggest repulsive characteristics. None is angry or wrathful. Furthermore, while the *mātṛ*s are likely pleasing in form, and are certainly not ugly, Kālī's repulsive body is an important part of the construction of her character. The most important differences between Kālī and the *mātṛ*s, however, lie in their respective textual prominence, their textual categorisations, and their origins. While Kālī emerges from the angry face of Caṇḍikā and is not a *śakti*, all of the *mātṛ*s are the *śakti*s of certain *deva*s. Kālī is significantly more textually prominent than are the *mātṛ*s, and is never grouped with them in verses describing their behaviour in battle. These differences suggest that Kālī is fundamentally different from the *mātṛ*s, a point affirmed by Kinsley, who notes that Kālī best exemplifies the cultural tradition of ferocious and bloodthirsty *devī*s represented within the *Devī Māhātmya* and discusses the *mātṛ*s separately.[120]

[120] Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess," 493-494. Bunce notes that Cāmuṇḍā, Kālī's epithet, is herself

Kālī and Śivadūtī are the two most immediately similar *devī*s in the *Devī Māhātmya*. Both emerge from Caṇḍikā, both are gruesome and frightening, and both repeatedly devour *asur*ic figures. Both characters also make loud noises, and Śivadūtī is twice linked to jackals.[121] While Kālī is not explicitly linked with animals, her use of her body as a weapon, a trait also shared by Śivadūtī who carries no weapons at all, may suggest an animal-like nature, as previously noted with respect to Nārasiṃhī and Vārāhī. Both Kālī and Śivadūtī speak, and, excluding Caṇḍikā, are the only *devī*s to do so; moreover, both speak imperiously and with some degree of haughtiness. Neither figure typically rides a mount, although both are frequently described as fighting in proximity to Caṇḍikā's lion.[122] Kālī and Śivadūtī's textual associations with Caṇḍikā are perhaps their greatest similarity; no other character has such a close relationship to Caṇḍikā as do these two figures. Their physical appearances differ in two immediately obvious yet relatively insignificant ways: Śivadūtī carries no weapons while Kālī carries four, and Śivadūtī has no clothing or ornaments while Kālī is clothed with a tiger skin and adorned with a garland of human heads. However, there are differences between the two which support the assertion that Kālī represents a different character type than the subtype exemplified by Śivadūtī. First, and perhaps most importantly, Kālī is not a *śakti*. This immediate classification is significant, as it suggests that Kālī is an entirely different sort of *devī* than are the *śakti*s, including both Śivadūtī and the *mātṛ*s. Second, Kālī is implicitly associated with anger, while Śivadūtī is not. Third, Kālī is much more textually prominent than Śivadūtī, and is described, both physically and behaviourally, in much greater detail. Finally, while the two

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commonly considered to be a *mātṛ*, but this reference is not textually supported by the *Devī Māhātmya*. "Chamunda," in *An Encyclopedia of Hindu Deities,*112.

121 DM 8.22 and 8.26.

122 DM 9.19-21, 9.35, and 9.39.

are associated textually through verses which place them together, Kālī is present for much more of the narrative than is Śivadūtī. Kālī's figure in and importance to the text is substantially different from Śivadūtī's, although these two characters share many important traits.

In comparison with Śivadūtī and the *mātṛ*s, Kālī's character is demonstrated to be more vicious and gruesome than are any of the *śakti*s. Kālī's character type is not only posited on semantic axes in different places from the *śakti*s, but also on different semantic axes altogether. Kālī is more violent and uglier than the *śakti*s, she is presented as haughty while the *mātṛ*s are not, and she is intimately connected with anger while the *śakti*s are not. Kālī's textual positioning argues for a completely different character type than those of the *śakti* subtypes, notwithstanding her similarities to Śivadūtī.

Kālī and the Monsters

Despite Kālī's explicit status as a *devī*, she shares multiple characteristics with the *asura*s as they are represented in both the *Devī Māhātmya* and the cultural world in which this text lives. These traits can be roughly divided into several categories: physical appearance, anger, intoxication, noise-making, and destructiveness in battle. While not all of Kālī's character traits indicate her similarities to the *asura*s, the similarities discussed here are more fundamental for her textual portrayal than are her similarities to the *mātṛ*s and Śivadūtī. Many of these parallels are only subtly presented in the text; the text does not explicitly state Kālī's resemblance to the *asura*s, and instead uses multiple elements to develop Kālī's character as noticeably *asur*ic.

Kālī's physical description is remarkably similar to that of the *asura*s, both in the *Devī Māhātmya* and in conceptions of *asura*s within Sanskrit mythological literature more

broadly. Within the *Devī Māhātmya*, both *asura*s and Kālī have reddened eyes and dark bodies, while in mythic narratives more generally, as previously noted, *asura*s are commonly described as having sunken bellies, long tongues, and wide mouths. These traits are similar to Kālī's textual description as emaciated and to the frequent textual references to her mouth. Kālī's mouth is explicitly linked to her vicious behaviour in battle, and all of the physical traits mentioned here continue to be pivotal features for Kālī throughout her representation in Hindu traditions. Her lolling tongue, in particular, characterises her figure and links it to blood-drinking, an important aspect of her figure in those later devotional traditions that commonly offer her blood sacrifice. The consistent linking of these traits to *asura*s indicates a connection between these characters that is supported through further similarities.

The reddish quality both of Kālī's and of the *asura*s' eyes is associated with both anger and intoxication. While the *asura*s are posited to be intoxicated with either arrogance or rage, Kālī is perhaps implicitly described as drunk on blood, and her later associations with intoxicating substances are well-known, particularly in *tantr*ic practices where blood sacrifice and the consumption of alcohol are often associated with her figure and worship.[123] For both Kālī and the *asura*s, the theme of anger is textually much more prominent than that of intoxication. As previously noted, the most common character trait of the *asura*s is their rage, and while anger is less explicitly present for Kālī's character, her emergence through Caṇḍikā's rage-filled face and her previously discussed expression of

[123] See, for example, Kṛṣṇānanda Āgamavāgīśa, "The *dhyānamantra* of *Śmaśānakālī*," in *Tantrasāra*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Basumatī Sāhitya Mandir, 1934), 1.374, as cited in David Kinsley, "Kālī: Blood and Death Out of Place," in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, eds. John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 77.

the *bhāva* of *krodha* support the importance of wrath in Kālī's textual representation.[124] On the semantic axis of anger/calmness, both the *asura*s and Kālī are posited at the extreme end of anger, and, unlike Caṇḍikā, do not display any features of tranquil behaviour to balance their rage. Kālī and the *asura*s are thus the characters most associated with anger, and this similarity is foundational for the construction of Kālī's character type.

Kālī's violence and destructiveness in battle is a trait also common to the *asura*s, although the *asura*s are ultimately unsuccessful in their military campaigns. All of the *asura*s in the *Devī Māhātmya* are strong enough to challenge the *deva*s, and all of them, excluding Madhu and Kaiṭabha, are also sufficiently powerful to wrest authority from them. Kālī is extraordinarily powerful and destructive, much more so than the *asura*s. Their behaviours indicate a significant resemblance in that both Kālī and the *asura*s engage in only destructive, battle-oriented actions. Neither is ever portrayed in ways that suggest textual functions or behaviours other than violence. This is also the case for the portrayals of Śivadūtī and the *mātṛ*s yet, as previously noted, neither of these character subtypes displays violence to the degree shown by both Kālī and the *asura*s, nor are the *śakti*s as textually prominent. Both Kālī and the *asura*s are also repeatedly described as making loud wordless noises, which, as discussed previously, indicate a potential for the destructive chaos made visible through their violent behaviour in the text. Both Kālī and the *asura*s also speak during the narrative, and many of the *asura*s' speeches indicate their anger and arrogance, as previously noted.

While Kālī is not representative of the *asur*ic character type, many of her features are clearly *asur*ic in quality. These similarities, visible especially through a brief

[124] Significantly, Bunce notes that *rākṣasa*s, who are often conflated with *asura*s, are in some myths considered to have been created from Brahmā's anger. "Rakshasas," *An Encyclopedia of Hindu Deities*, 437.

examination of the previously discussed semantic axes, suggest that Kālī is, thus far, most similar to the *asura*s. Both are extremely violent rather than peaceful, both are associated with anger, both are portrayed as arrogant or prideful, and neither has pleasing forms. The sole semantic axis on which they differ is the generous/selfish axis: with Caṇḍikā posited on the generous extremity and the *asura*s on the selfish pole, Kālī is located somewhere in between. She is neither selfish nor particularly generous, although she does offer the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa to Caṇḍikā as a sacrifice. The physical similarities between Kālī and the *asura*s, both in this text and more generally, suggest an *asur*ic quality to Kālī's portrayal, and the only significant differences between Kālī and the *asura*s are Kālī's explicit designation as a *devī* and Kālī's position as a warrior fighting against the *asura*s.

As a final note, Kālī's weapons and ornaments also connect her to the *asura*s, but in extremely subtle ways that incorporate Kālī's two textual similarities to the *deva*s. First, the skull atop her staff and her tiger skin are common iconographic motifs of Śiva, who is frequently connected to *asura*s in both epic and *purāṇ*ic literature. Second, Kālī's noose is textually connected to Varuṇa, who gives Caṇḍikā a noose in the second episode. In Vedic cosmology, Varuṇa was considered to be the chief of the *asura*s much as Indra was the chief of the *deva*s; Varuna's indeterminate status as both a *deva* and an *asura* is a clear example of the Vedic ambiguity previously discussed.[125] While none of these links explicitly connects Kālī to *asura*s, the connections nevertheless act to support her similarities with this category of characters. These elements, together with the similarities previously described and her resemblances to some of the *śakti*s, weave together to form the image of a *devī* who is predominantly *asur*ic in both appearance and behaviour.

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[125] Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology*, 47.

Kālī's character type is clearly that of an *asur*ic *devī* rather than simply that of a ferocious *devī*, or of an *asurī* temporarily considered to be a *devī*. The text presents Kālī as a *devī*, not an *asurī*: not only does the text explicitly state such a status, but the text's positing of Kālī as a character fighting for the *deva*s against the *asura*s clearly marks her as a *devī*. As noted previously, within the larger context of Hindu mythological narratives *asura*s are considered to be a group of beings eternally in conflict with the *deva*s. The two are often defined in opposition to one another, and by aligning Kālī on the side of the *deva*s, the text renders it impossible to consider Kālī as an *asurī*. While there is certainly a prior tradition of non-Sanskritic bloodthirsty *devī*s, the idea of which, as Kinsley argues, was likely incorporated into the theology of the *Devī Māhātmya*, Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* is not simply a bloodthirsty and ferocious *devī*. Kinsley does note, however, that at the time of the text's composition, Kālī was likely the most well-known of the bloodthirsty *devī*s present in the larger mythic context.[126] Kālī's clear similarities to *asura*s indicate instead that her nature, as constructed in this text, is fundamentally similar to that of the *asura* characters. Nearly every characteristic described by the *Devī Māhātmya* to illustrate Kālī's character is also applied to the *asura*s, either by this text or by mythic narratives more broadly. Their connections are still visible by examining only the depictions of each in the *Devī Māhātmya*, which include their reddened eyes and violent and angry nature, and the presence of these traits within cultural depictions of *asura*s strengthens this similarity. Thus Kālī, while a bloodthirsty and ferocious *devī*, is a *devī* who is also *asur*ic.

[126] Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess," 494.

Kālī as the Monstrous Goddess

Kālī's identity as an *asur*ic *devī* and her close relationship with Caṇḍikā indicate that the *Devī Māhātmya* constructs the character of Kālī to be the *mahāsurī*, or the *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*. The *Devī Māhātmya* makes an explicit reference to the *mahāsurī*, as well as references to epithets closely associated with it. In Brahmā's devotional *stotra* in the first subnarrative, he explicitly labels Caṇḍikā as both the *mahādevī* and the *mahāsurī*.[127] Coburn translates *mahāsurī* as "the great demoness," while Pushpendra Kumar translates the term to mean the "power of demons."[128] Several other devotional phrases also praise these terrible aspects of the *mahādevī*. For example, following Mahiṣāsura's defeat, the *deva*s ask for protection to be granted to them by both the "gentle forms" and the "exceedingly terrible [forms]" of the *mahādevī*.[129] The appeal to both the gentle and the terrible aspects of the *mahādevī* is repeated again when the *deva*s ask for help following their defeat at the hands of Śumbha and Niśumbha;[130] during this request the *deva*s explicitly praise both the benevolent and malevolent forms: "Hail to Prakṛti, the auspicious! […] To the terrible one, hail!"[131] Brahmā's *stotra* suggests that this terrible form is associated with having multiple weapons,[132] and there are several other references to elements of the *mahādevī* that seem related to these *mahāsur*ic forms: the *mahādevī* as shadow, for example, and the *mahādevī* as the pestilence that destroys the earth at the end of time; this latter form is given the epithet of Māhākālī.[133] The *mahādevī* is also referred to as the *kālarātri*, the *mahārātri*, and the *moharātri*; Coburn argues that these references are

[127] DM 1.58.
[128] Pushpendra Kumar, "Concept of Śakti in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa," *Journal of the Oriental Institute* 41, nos. 3-4 (1992): 197.
[129] DM 4.25.
[130] DM 5.11.
[131] DM 5.7-8.
[132] DM 1.61.
[133] DM 5.17 and 12.35, respectively.

closely related to Kālī's character.[134] The last term refers to the power of illusion, or *māyā*, a concept which has significant implications both for the *mahādevī* and for Kālī's position as the *mahāsur*ic aspect of this figure. Kālī's textual connections to this concept strengthen her association with *asura*s, as *māyā* is often associated with *asur*ic figures.

The association of the *mahādevī* with the concept of *māyā* is an important part of the *Devī Māhātmya*'s representation of the *mahādevī*. Kinsley notes that *māyā*, in philosophical traditions, refers primarily to illusion based in ignorance.[135] As the *mahāmāyā*, the *mahādevī* is thus the great illusion, binding one to the cosmos rather than freeing one from it. Since the *mahādevī* is also viewed as the knowledge that can set one free, an early Upaniṣadic concept, the *mahādevī* is thus paradoxical in nature, reflecting the text's view of the *mahādevī* as all-encompassing.[136] Rodrigues notes that in early Vedic texts *māyā* is a key trait of the *asura*s, and also of figures such as Vṛtra and Dānava, who are significant *asur*ic characters in later texts.[137] Coburn argues that this association signifies the close connection between *mahāmāyā* and the *mahāsurī*, and the *mahādevī*'s identity as *mahāmāyā* points to her transcendence of the conventional division between *deva*s and *asura*s.[138] The concept of *māyā* is thus an example of the ambiguity between *dev*ic and *asur*ic figures. The connection between *mahāmāyā* and *mahāsurī* is also noted by Elizabeth Cecil, who defines *māyā* in this context as "creative power," but a power that can

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[134] Coburn, *Devī-Māhātmya: The Crystallization*, 108-109, footnote 68. The verse cited is DM 1.59; the translations of the epithets are, respectively, "the night of destruction," "the great night," and "the terrible night of delusion."
[135] David Kinsley, "Blood and Death out of Place: Reflections on the Goddess Kālī," in *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, eds. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1982), 150.
[136] Coburn, "Consort of None,"155.
[137] Rodrigues, "Asuras and Daityas," 470.
[138] Coburn, "Consort of None," 155.

also denote cunning or deception, referring back to its earlier meaning of delusion.[139] Cecil argues that the concepts of *asura*, *māyā*, and *śakti* are closely connected, and suggests that the *mahādevī*'s possession of or identification with *māyā*, and thus *asura*s, allows her to overpower the *asur*ic forces that defeat the *deva*s.[140] Thus, the *mahādevī* can defeat the *asura*s while the *deva*s cannot, because she herself is both *dev*ic and *asur*ic in nature. Kinsley directly associates *māyā* with Kālī's figure in Hindu traditions more generally, arguing that she represents both delusion and the threat of *māyā* to the order of civilisation.[141] As noted above, Coburn associates Kālī's character in the *Devī Māhātmya* with the power of *māyā*, thus connecting Kālī more closely both to *asura*s and with the particular *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*. The significance of anger to Kālī's status as this *asur*ic aspect is also particularly important; anger, as previously noted, is textually connected most strongly with the *asura*s and, since Kālī also expresses Caṇḍikā's embodied wrath, Caṇḍikā's own *asur*ic qualities are presented most clearly in Kālī's figure. All of the traits and concepts associated with the *mahāsurī* are demonstrated most clearly by the figure of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*, who is, as Agrawala describes her, the "most hideus [*sic*] aspect of the Goddess."[142] Kinsley also discusses the terrible nature of Kālī, claiming that "she epitomizes the wild, fearful aspects of the divine."[143] Kālī's position as a *devī* with fundamentally *asur*ic qualities, as well as her association with *māyā*, indicates her status as the expression of the *mahādevī*'s *mahāsur*ic aspect.

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[139] Elizabeth Ann Cecil, "A New Approach to the Devīmāhātmya: The Greatness of the Goddess in its Purāṇic Context," master's thesis, University of Tennessee, 2008, 45-46.
[140] Ibid., 44-46.
[141] Kinsley, "Blood and Death Out of Place," 150.
[142] Vasudeva S. Agrawala, *Devī-Māhātmyam: The Glorification of the Great Goddess* (Varanasi: All India Kashi Raj Trust, 1963), 209.
[143] David Kinsley, "Freedom from Death in the Worship of Kālī," *Numen* 22, no. 3 (1975): 188.

Kālī's position as the expression of the *asur*ic *devī* character type places her on the boundary between the *devī*s and the *asura*s. Of all the *devī*s, Kālī is the most *asur*ic-like and the most dissimilar to the *devī*s as a larger character group. Kālī thus exists within this text as a liminal character, whose characteristics and features point towards the murky boundary between *asura*s and *devī*s more generally. Victor Turner defines liminal figures as those who are positioned between established categories;[144] while he uses the term to refer specifically to rituals, it is a useful word to describe Kālī's position, both in the *Devī Māhātmya* and in other textual representations. Richard Kearney notes that some figures, including gods and monsters, represent extremity and subvert established categories;[145] he argues that monsters are especially liminal, as they defy borders and transgress conventions.[146] He claims that those figures "which hang around borders, and disrespect their integrity, are traditionally known as 'monsters.'"[147] As a goddess and a monster, Kālī is a figure who defies easy categorisation and for whom a liminal position is particularly representative of her character. This liminality also suggests some points about Kālī's character that are significant for her later textual representations. As noted previously, Rodrigues claims that later versions of Kālī, which view her as the supreme deity, nevertheless portray her to be *asur*ic or *rākṣas*ic in certain aspects and thus ambiguous in nature. Chapter Two of this project discussed Kālī's later textual associations with *asura*s and other similar figures; *tantr*ic texts, in particular, often focus on these subversive qualities of her figure. Kālī-worship often contains elements that are viewed as polluting and inauspicious, particularly in *tantr*ic practices where devotional rituals can include such

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[144] Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 95.
[145] Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.
[146] Ibid., 117.
[147] Richard Kearney, *On Stories,* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 119.

objects as blood and corpses.[148] Animal sacrifice remains a popular devotional practice in Kālī-oriented devotional traditions, and while modern Kālī *bhakti* includes the concept of Kālī as loving and gentle, her fierce and terrible aspects, particularly those historically and culturally associated with *asura*s and *rākṣasa*s, remain firmly entrenched in her mythology, her iconography, and in the rituals devoted to her. Kinsley argues that throughout Hindu traditions Kālī is a figure who threatens the stable order by her dangerous and frightening lack of control.[149] Kālī thus represents a liminal figure throughout her representations, situated both on the periphery and at the centre, and this position is especially clear in her representation in the *Devī Māhātmya*, where she is posited as the *asur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī* and thus as the *mahāsurī*.

Some Concluding Remarks about Goddesses as Liminal Figures

The preceding discussion of Kālī's liminal status in the *Devī Māhātmya* with respect to the *devī*s and the *asura*s suggests implications for the status of the *devī*s in the text as a whole. Since all of the *devī*s are conceptualised as being ultimately subsumed into the *mahādevī*, and indeed the *devī*s do return to the body of Caṇḍikā towards the end of the third episode,[150] the position of the *mahādevī* in this text can signify the position of all *devī*s as they are conceived of by the *Devī Māhātmya*. Cecil's suggestion that the *mahādevī* is better able to fight the *asura*s because of her associations with *māyā*, traditionally associated with *asura*s, has potential implications for the *mahādevī*'s position with respect to *asura*s and *deva*s. This position becomes more apparent after a close analysis of Kālī's

[148] June McDaniel, "Kālī," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 602.
[149] Kinsley, "Blood and Death: Out of Place,"148.
[150] DM 10.4.

position, as Kālī and Caṇḍikā share many of the aspects that contributed to Kālī's status as an *asur*ic *devī*.

Simply by linguistic association, both Kālī and Caṇḍikā, as *devī*s, are connected with and categorised similarly to the *deva*s. This categorisation is strengthened by the position of the *mahādevī* on the side of the *deva*s during battle; as has been previously noted, the definition of an *asura* is usually considered in opposition to the *deva*s. By firmly positioning the *mahādevī*, and thus all *devī*s, as supporters and protectors of the *deva*s, the *Devī Māhātmya* seems to suggest initially that the *devī*s too are fundamentally opposed to the *asura*s. However, Kālī's position as the *asur*ic *devī* indicates that the *devī*s are more complex than this simple dichotomy would indicate. The associations between *mahāmāyā*, as the aspect of the *mahādevī* that expresses *māyā*, and *māyā* as the power of the *asura*s indicate important intersections between the *mahādevī* as *mahāmāyā* and as the *mahāsurī*. Kālī's connections with *māyā* and her own *asur*ic nature and features, and in particular her character's position as the *mahāsurī*, signify strong correlations among *māyā*, *asura*s, the *mahādevī*'s expressions as *mahāmāyā* and the *mahāsurī*, and Kālī herself. Kālī's representation in the *Devī Māhātmya* as necessary for success in battle, along with the understanding of the *mahādevī* herself as necessary for victory over the *asura*s, suggest that, as Cecil proposes, the strength and power of the *mahādevī*, and thus all *devī*s, are due to the overlapping qualities shared by *asura*s and *devī*s. While Kālī is the most *asur*ic of the *devī*s, which is necessary for her representation as an *asur*ic *devī*, all of the *devī*s share some of these qualities, differentiating them from the *deva*s and suggesting important links between *asura*s and *devī*s more generally.

In a similar fashion to Kālī's liminal position between the *devī*s and the *asura*s in this text, the *mahādevī* also exists in a liminal space, between the borders of *asura*s and

*deva*s, and is connected to each group in fundamentally important ways. The *mahādevī* is ultimately neither *deva* nor *asura*, thus indicating the *Devī Māhātmya*'s conception of *devī*s as beings who are neither fully *dev*ic nor fully *asur*ic. By encompassing both aspects of this binary, which is foundational for most Hindu mythic narratives, the *mahādevī* subsumes these categories into herself, indicating that the *Devī Māhātmya* ultimately conceives of all *devī*s as both *dev*ic and *asur*ic. The *devī*s in the *Devī Māhātmya*, including those who are not constructed to be particularly *asur*ic, thus subvert traditionally understood categories of the divine and the monstrous; by their ferociousness, violence, and liminal status they too can be viewed as monstrous goddesses.

Conclusion

The portrayal of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* is of a monstrous goddess: a figure explicitly categorised as a *devī* who bears striking similarity both to the *asura*s in the text and to the *asura*s and *rākṣasa*s in the cultural world in which the text lives. This depiction of Kālī resonates within her larger literary context, as these early associations with *asura*s and *asur*ic traits are pivotal characteristics for Kālī's depiction throughout her textual representations. Such understandings of Kālī are made visible in the *Devī Māhātmya* through the application of literary theories, both western and Indian, to the study of her character as presented by the text. This project has demonstrated the usefulness of applying literary theories to the study of character in *purāṇ*ic narratives, and suggests that the *Devī Māhātmya* is best understood within the context of Sanskrit literature more generally. The conceptions of Kālī as *asur*ic generally, and as the expression of the *mahāsurī* aspect of the *mahādevī* more specifically, are significant both for Kālī's own larger literary context and for understanding the interactions and relationships among the cultural conceptions of the *deva*s, the *devī*s, and the *asura*s.

This project's close reading of the character of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya* demonstrates the applicability of various aspects of western literary theory to the study of characters in Hindu narrative literature. Studying Kālī through this lens affords a close and detailed examination both of Kālī's figure and of the ways by which this particular *purāṇ*ic narrative constructs its characters. Most of the information provided by a close reading of the text with respect to Kālī's character is not new to Kālī studies; Kālī is already conceived of by western scholarship as violent, repulsive, and boundary-crossing, and she is known to be associated with polluting concepts and substances. This project provides further details

in support of this larger conception of Kālī, and demonstrates that these pivotal characteristics were associated with Kālī at the time of the *Devī Māhātmya*'s composition. The conclusions of this thesis differ from general Kālī scholarship by intimately connecting Kālī with the *asura*s in the *Devī Māhātmya* and in Hindu mythological narratives more broadly. This close association is made visible through a detailed study of Kālī's character, and it is the consideration of Kālī's character type in context with the text's other character types that allows both for the conception of Kālī as an *asur*ic *devī* and for her position as Caṇḍikā's *mahāsurī* aspect. Reading the *Devī Māhātmya* as literature and examining Kālī as a literary character can enrich scholarly understandings of Kālī in the *Devī Māhātmya*, in the cultural world at the time of the text's composition, and in her later textual representations.

This project has also contributed to understanding the *Devī Māhātmya* as a text within a larger textual world. By situating Kālī's character within the context of Sanskrit literature, the relationship of the *Devī Māhātmya* to this literature is made clearer. In constructing the character of Kālī, the *Devī Māhātmya* uses literary themes prominent in Sanskrit texts, such as the *rasa*s and the trope of grotesque and sacrificial violence, in order to situate itself more firmly within this literary tradition. Although the *Devī Māhātmya* is not the type of literature most frequently associated with Sanskrit literary theory, as is *kāvya* and, increasingly, *itihāsa*, it nevertheless demonstrates several literary tropes common to Sanskrit literary culture. The presence of these themes in the *Devī Māhātmya*, as was demonstrated through this study of Kālī's character, suggests that studying *purāṇ*ic narratives more generally with recourse to this larger literary context may provide valuable information concerning the *purāṇa*s and their place in the processes of cultural, religious, and literary developments during the post-epic period.

The *Devī Māhātmya*'s composition during a time of religious innovation and cultural interaction indicates that it may reflect these processes both in its conception of the *mahādevī* and in its depictions of *devī*s. Scholars are nearly unanimous in asserting the non-Āryan impulse behind *devī*-worship, and, as Thomas Coburn argues, the *Devī Māhātmya* represents the earliest extant textual account of the processes by which both Āryan concepts of *dev*ic feminine figures and non-Āryan ferocious *devī*s were subsumed together into the larger brahmanic concept of the *mahādevī.* The larger processes of Sanskritisation, or brahmanic assimilation, occurred in many different forms throughout the subcontinent; the example of the *Devī Māhātmya* is particularly relevant to the consideration of *devī*s, *asura*s, and the developing concept of the *mahādevī*. Kālī's position as the *mahāsur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī* is significant in this context, as it allows for a closer glimpse at the ways in which the brahmanic cultures conceived of non-Āryan deities, as well as at the means by which the interactions between these two larger cultural groups occurred during this time period. Kālī's description as *asur*ic is also relevant to considerations of her larger literary context, particularly within those *bhakti* traditions devoted to her.

Kālī's close relationship with Caṇḍikā indicates that, while the ultimate objective of the text is to present the theological concept of the *mahādevī*, the incorporation of these ferocious *devī*s is an important aspect of the overall intention of the *Devī Māhātmya*. The ferocious *devī*s, represented by Kālī, are seen as an important part of the *mahādevī* herself, and this is made clearer through the text's explicit connection of the *mahādevī* and the *mahāsurī*. Through the figure of Kālī, who, as was demonstrated by this thesis, is best understood as an *asur*ic *devī*, the ferocious *devī*s are associated with the *asura*s and *rākṣasa*s already present in textual narratives. The *Devī Māhātmya* strengthens this connection by explicitly describing Kālī and the *asura*s in similar ways; as was argued,

these connections serve to suggest that Kālī represents, in this text, an aspect of the *mahādevī* closely connected to *asura*s and labelled as the *mahāsurī*. Kālī's expression of this aspect allows the text to express the necessary theological concept of the *mahāsurī*, inherent in the conception of a *mahādevī* who incorporates and embodies all aspects of reality. Thus, Kālī's association with the *asura*s, as well as her status as the representative of the category of ferocious *devī*s, indicates that this category of *devī*s as a whole is closely linked to *asur*ic and *rākṣas*ic concepts.

The concept of Kālī as the paradigmatic *asur*ic *devī* is enriched by considering the concepts of purity and pollution within the larger Hindu traditions. The *asura*s and *rākṣasa*s are commonly associated with pollution, both in themselves and in the concepts and substances with which they are associated. Kālī, who is herself *asur*ic, is made more *asur*ic by her consumption of the *asura*s; this is also the case for those other *devī*s in the *Devī Māhātmya* who consume *asur*ic flesh: Śivadūtī and Nārasiṃhī. Pollution is often conceived of as being transferable through consumed substances; brahmanic strictures about food are thus intimately linked to concepts of purity and pollution.[1] Eating flesh, particularly raw flesh, is considered extremely polluting within the orthodox Hindu traditions, and blood is one of the most polluting substances. Scholarship on Kālī recognises her as a figure intimately linked with pollution; this association is, perhaps, part of the reasons for which *tantra* considers her to be a supreme figure: overcoming pollution, or the concept of pollution, is an important aspect of both *tantr*ic theory and practice.[2] This pollution also connects Kālī more strongly to the aesthetic theory of *rasa* discussed

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[1] Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, trans. David White (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[2] See, for example, David Kinsley, "Kālī: Blood and Death Out of Place," in *Devī: Goddesses of India*, eds. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

previously. As David Gitomer claims, Kālī, as a bloody *devī*, is placed within the concept of pollution and thus among those peoples who are themselves conceived of as polluting by the brahmanic worldview.[3] Gitomer notes that Kālī is associated with the *caṇḍāla*s, or the fierce caste, who often perform tasks that put them in close contact with polluting substances; these peoples are now more commonly known as the Dalits. While considering Kālī, as well as these groups of people, within the context of purity and pollution may seem reductive, Gitomer argues that within Sanskrit literature this binary is a powerful heuristic device that can allow for connections among aesthetics, texts, and behaviours to be made more visible. Furthermore, he explicitly links this pollution to *raudra*, and to Kālī's embodiment of Caṇḍikā's wrath. He notes that Kālī shows remarkably similarity to the *asura*s in that both engage in polluting behaviour, as do the *caṇḍāla*s, and claims that Kālī "appears as a demonic specialization of Durgā."[4] The concept of pollution underlying Sanskrit literature and brahmanic worldviews thus supports this project's assertion that Kālī represents the *mahāsur*ic aspect of the *mahādevī*, and in so doing represents the polluting and polluted *devī*s associated with that aspect.

Kālī's position as the *mahāsurī*, an important aspect of the *mahādevī*, likely contributed to her own depiction as the supreme ontological reality in later traditions. Her ability to present both *dev*ic and *asur*ic qualities is an important part of her position in *tantr*ic and devotional traditions, and contributes to the love her devotees often profess for her. The expression of Kālī as *asur*ic also resonates within her later literary representations, and provides some evidence for her development as the supreme divinity in both *tantra* and later *bhakti* traditions. As mentioned previously, Rodrigues cites Kālī as a particularly clear

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[3] David L. Gitomer, "Wrestling with *raudra* in Sanskrit poetics: Gender, pollution, and *śāstra*," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 4, no. 3 (2000): 227-231.
[4] Ibid., 228.

example of a *dev*ic figure who also presents *asur*ic or *rākṣas*ic qualities.[5] In her *purāṇ*ic representations, discussed briefly in Chapter Two, Kālī is frequently presented as the embodied wrath of a *devī*, and, as this thesis has noted, anger is a fundamental characteristic of the *asura*s. She is often associated with *asura*s, *rākṣasa*s, and other monstrous beings, such as *piśāca*s, as well as with those figures, places, and concepts on the periphery of brahmanic society: tribal peoples, thieves, lower castes, cremation grounds, forests or jungles, blood, death, pollution, and heteroprax sexualities. These associations are particularly important for her representations in *tantra*, in which the concept of Kālī as the supreme reality and salvific universal presence develops. This conception, which often explicitly includes the fearsome and repulsive aspects of Kālī in order to demonstrate the totality of her nature, is also important within those later *bhakti* traditions devoted to her. As this thesis noted, the devotional poetry dedicated to Kālī in Bengal affirms her status as the ultimate *devī* and cosmic reality, and much of that poetry references those bloodthirsty and vicious aspects of her character which have their roots in the ferocious *devī*s incorporated into brahmanic traditions through the *Devī Māhātmya*. Kinsley argues that the presence of Kālī within the Hindu traditions affirms these traditions' conception of divinity as itself containing fearsome qualities;[6] Kālī's character, both in this text and throughout her larger textual contexts, expresses qualities fundamental to many Hindu traditions, particularly the inclusion of opposites into a multiplicity and totality affirmed as the divine reality. Despite Kālī's repulsive and violent attributes, which serve to suggest her monstrosity, she is nevertheless an important and beloved goddess

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[5] Rodrigues, "Asuras and Daityas," 475.
[6] Kinsley, "The Portrait of the Goddess," 204.

within various Hindu traditions. Part of the reason for such widespread devotion to her is perhaps her expression of both the monstrous and the divine.

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